Guitar MAGAZINE

MARCH 2019
ISSUE 366
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ALL HAIL THE NEW KINGS OF THE BLUES

FEATURING GARY CLARK JR, DEREK TRUCKS & ERIC GALES

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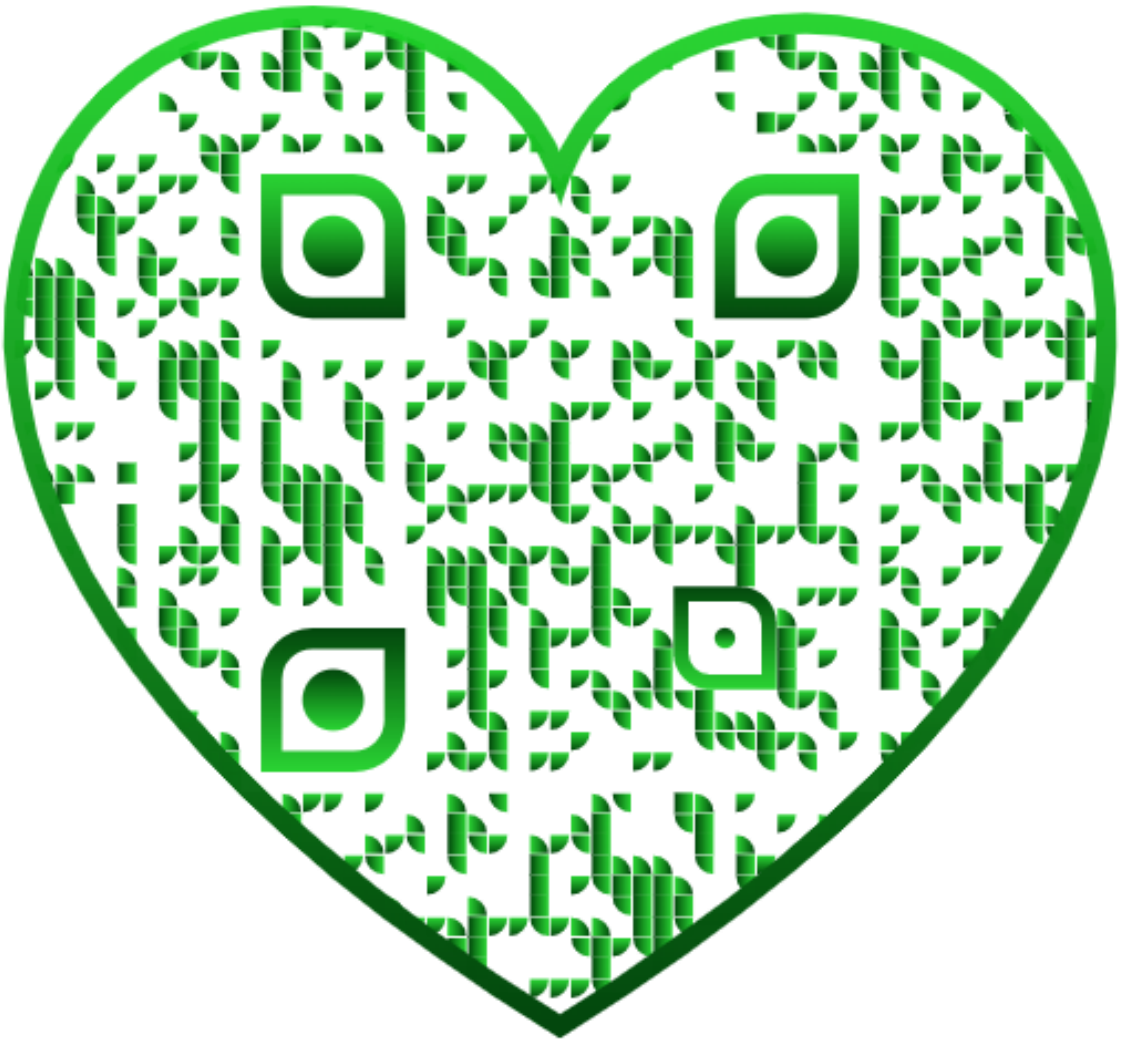

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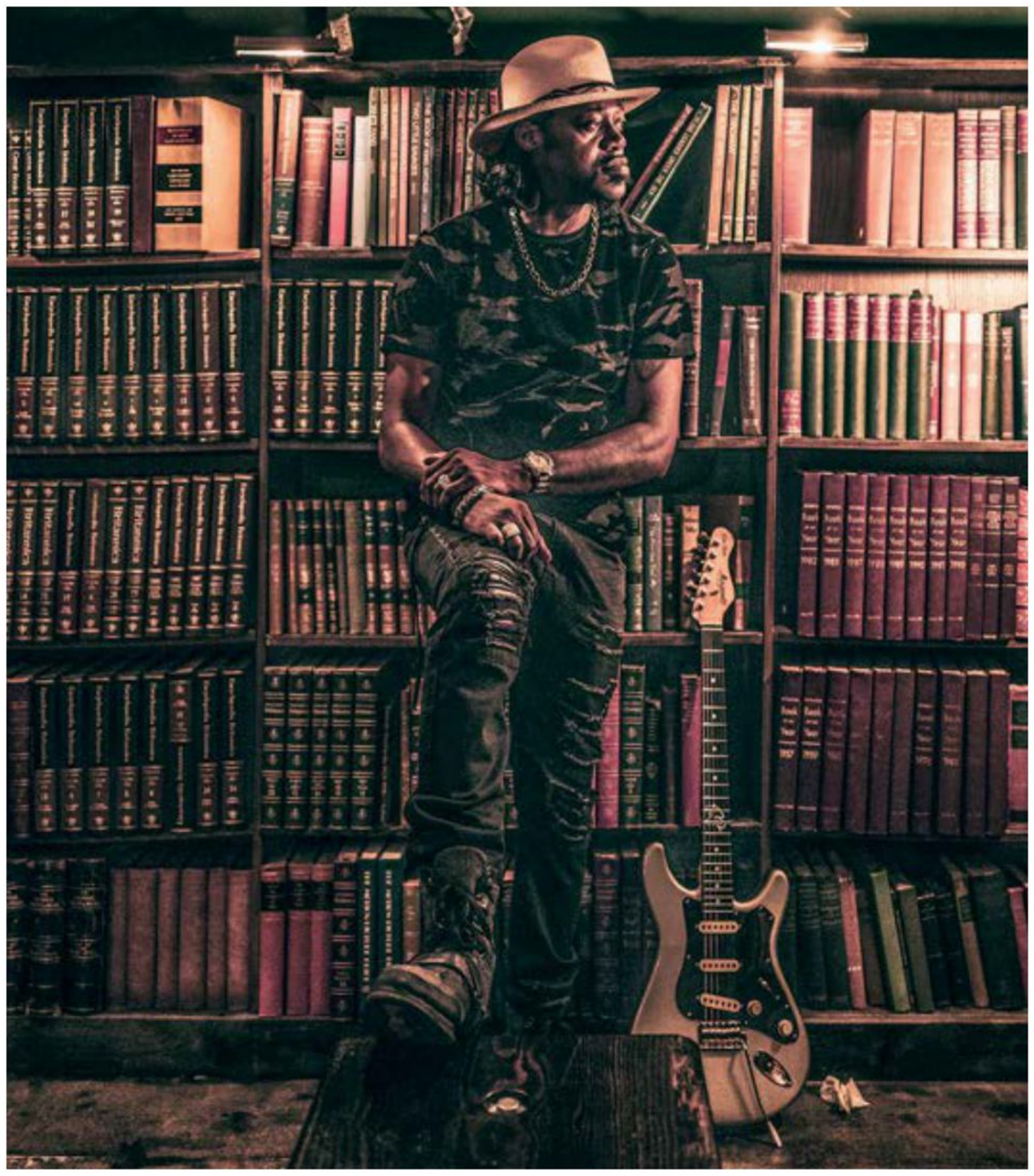

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EDITOR'S LETTER

21ST-CENTURY BLUES

As the foundation stone upon which the lion's share of Western popular music is based, the blues is nothing if not adaptable. The great innovations of early 20th-century instrument-making gave acoustic musicians newer and richer voices, and from the moment the electrified Spanish guitar crackled into life, the parallel evolution of the blues in its numerous forms, and the myriad genres it spawned, is the real story of modern folk music.

The three kings of modern blues guitar that grace this month's *Guitar Magazine* provide compelling evidence that the genre has plenty left in the tank. Infused with influences as disparate as modern R&B, Hindustani classical music and gospel, messrs Clark, Trucks and Gales all bring something new to the table while ensuring that the blues remains a socially conscious medium.

Change and innovation are recurring themes this month. As well as rounding up a selection of the hottest gear launches of the new year, we've devoted 32 pages to the Grand Pacific from Taylor Guitars. Just as modern guitar heroes meld past and present in their music-making, in developing the Grand Pacific, Taylor's master guitar designer Andy Powers has fused his revolutionary V-Class bracing design with the influence of the classic American flat-tops that powered the bluegrass and folk rock that resounded during his formative years. The result is a beguiling slope-shoulder dreadnought that comes in three distinct flavours and looks set to be the biggest story in acoustic guitar in 2019.

I hope you enjoy this month's magazine – we've had great feedback on the new look and there are plenty of exciting things planned for *Guitar.com* and *Guitar Magazine* in the months ahead. See you next month, when some of the biggest names in guitar will help you become a better player…

Chris Vinnicombe
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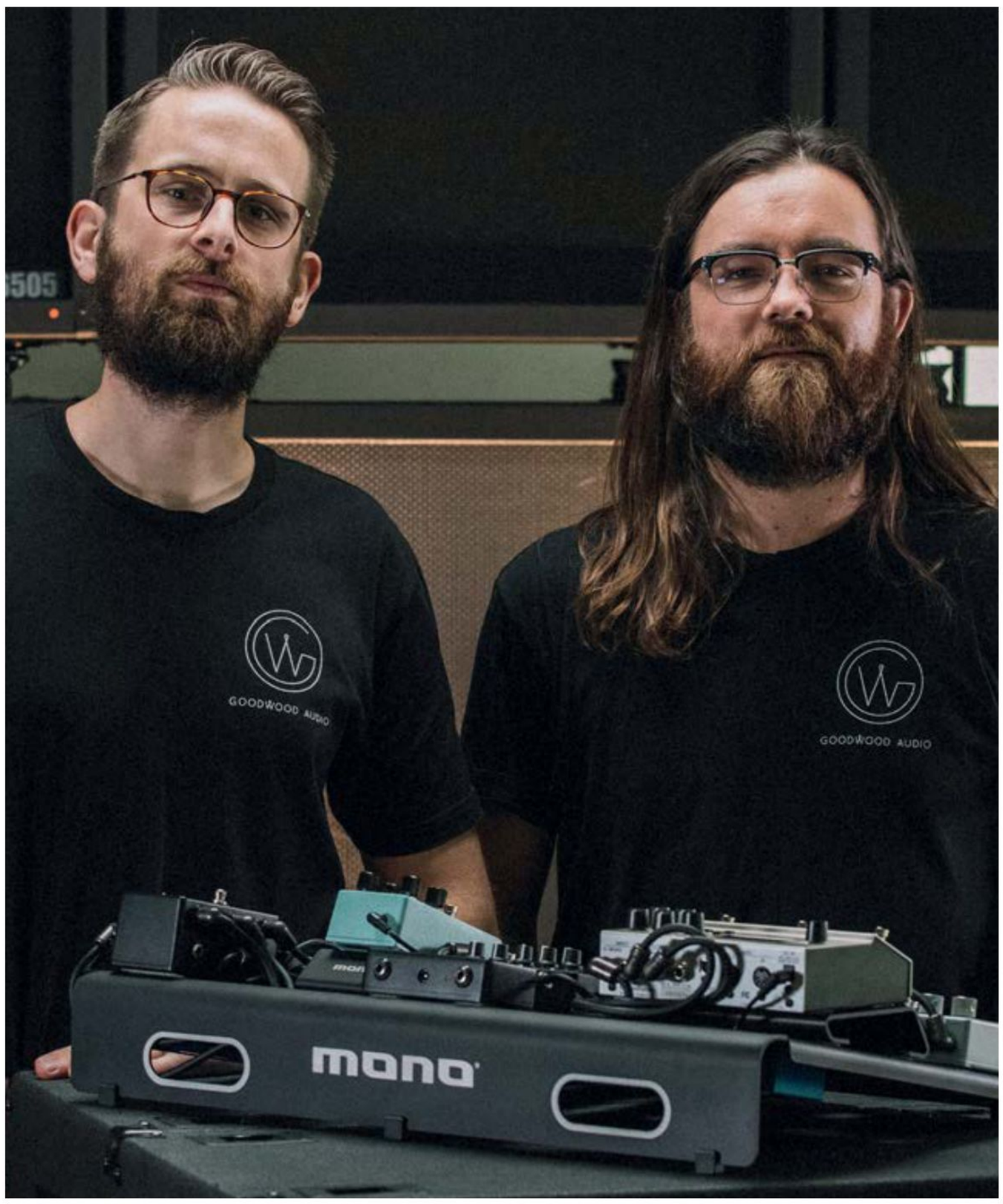
FRETBUZZ

Your letters and observations on the world of guitar

Join the conversation Email us at editors@guitar.com



INSIDE STORY

Dear *Guitar Magazine*, I wanted to drop you a line to congratulate you on your February issue. The free strings were fantastic and I really loved a lot of your new and reworked features. One of the ones that really jumped out for me was the 'Industry Insider' feature with Goodwood Audio. To be honest, I'd never heard of Goodwood beforehand, but as someone who has often ummed and ahhed about starting up my own pedal business, hearing Grant and Mikey tell the story of how they established themselves was so inspirational.

I've been mucking about with pedals in my garage for a few years now – mainly clones and mod-type stuff, but I've tried my hand at a few unique circuits and I think they've sounded pretty good! I hope you do more of this stuff in the future, as it really encourages people like me who hope to maybe try to follow their example one day. Thanks again, and maybe you'd like to review my pedals someday?

BOB WILLIAMS, VIA EMAIL

Thanks for your email, Bob – we hope that the insights gained from Industry Insider will help inspire the next generation of effects builders, amp-makers and luthiers to turn their passion into a career. And we're always happy to put interesting new gear to the test, regardless of the size of the company behind it.

BEGINNER'S LUCK

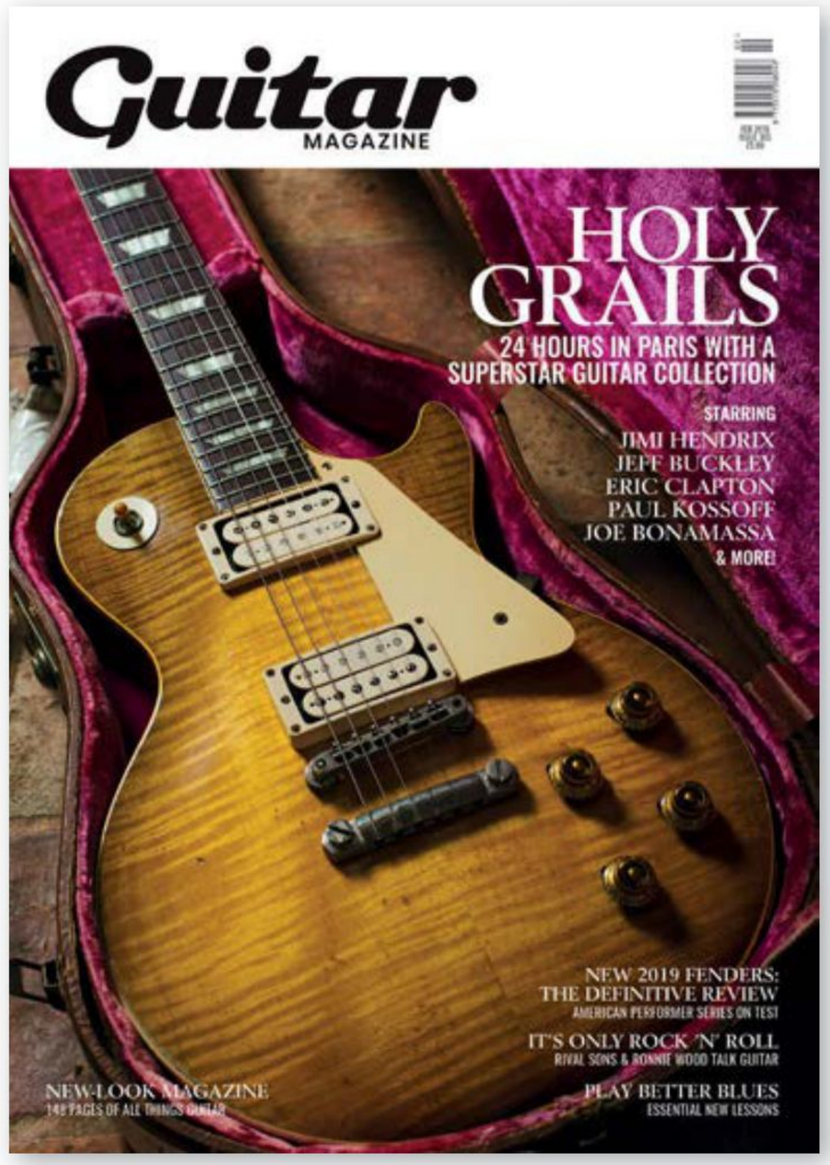
Dear *GM*, the February edition looked great and I really enjoyed the articles, but the real gem for me was the 12-bar blues lesson by Leigh Fuge. I am an eternal beginner and found this to be pitched at the perfect level for me. I'm really looking forward to the next steps!

DAVE HALL, VIA EMAIL

GAS MAN

Dear *Guitar Magazine*, I've been playing guitar for about 15 years now, and admittedly never bothered to keep up with new releases – guitars, or gear in general. I've always focused on playing, playing and playing… Yet the January 2019 issue turned out to be a trove of information. I had a great time going through the Gear Of The Year 2018 feature. As a matter of fact, I took your advice and recently acquired a Gretsch G5420TG. This is such a beautiful guitar, with a clarity and tone so unlike both my Fender Deluxe Tele and Epiphone Les Paul Custom – I couldn't be any happier. I look forward to more reviews in 2019!

FRANCISCO LIMA, VIA EMAIL



THE NEW ERA

We're always keen to hear your views on the content we create, so don't hesitate to join in the conversation on your social-media platform of choice. Much of the chat on *Guitar.com* channels this month has been about our swanky new redesign issue – here are a couple of choice cuts:

Got my first copy in a while yesterday,
I'm a subscriber of another guitar magazine.
A very good read, really interesting and doing something the other mags don't. Thanks – great strings, too!

SEAN BRODERICK, FACEBOOK

Got my copy of the mag, and it's also my first purchase – I'm surprised how good it is! Normally, I'll scan through mags at Tesco, and I'm usually done in 10 minutes, but now you have a new customer.

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ONES TO WATCH

SLOTHRUST @SLOTHRUST

INTERVIEW HUW BAINES

This LA-via-Boston power trio blend bubblegum pop and straight-up noise, powered by guitarist Leah Wellbaum's explosive, expressive shots of distortion. She tells us about offsets, whammy and chemistry…

When did you first come to the guitar?
"I started piano when I was five. I come from a line of classical musicians, so it was assumed I'd do music in some capacity… When I started high school, I picked up the guitar. My parents got me an acoustic for Christmas and I fell in love with it. I loved that it was something I could do alone in my room. The piano is a very public instrument."

Who was inspiring you, at that point?
"I was a huge Elliott Smith fan in my teens. Around that same time, I also went to the library and checked out a John Fahey CD on a whim. I fell in love with his fingerpicking style; the way he was able to make the guitar speak beyond just chords or linear movements."

On your latest album *The Pact*, there's a great chemistry between the three of you…
"Will [Gorin, drums], Kyle [Bann, bass] and I have been playing together for a long time. We used to play in blues groups in college, where I wasn't the singer and also in jazz performance groups, hip-hop groups… at one point, Kyle and I were in a chamber-music improv group… We were already used to communicating with music."

Did you have to adapt your playing style to work in a power-trio format?
"The other groups we played in primarily did covers and there was a second guitarist. Usually, I was the rhythm guitarist… I hadn't really cut my teeth playing lead guitar, nor was I confident. But I saw a lot of boys be incredibly confident at playing lead guitar, and a lot of them weren't very good. They just thought they were. I was like, 'Y'know what? I got this.' I practised hard for my junior year of college and went into the following year feeling confident about my ability to play lead and rhythm."

You seem to have an affinity for offsets…
"Yeah, my main guitar is a Tom Anderson Raven Superbird and the other I play on stage a lot is a Jazzmaster in Aztec Gold. It has Curtis Novak noise-cancelling pickups in it. Both are super-ferocious and versatile."

Is that versatility important to you?
"I wouldn't say I look for versatility so much as something that feels right in my hands… The main thing I wanted was a tremolo system that could do something similar to divebombs without going out of tune. Having that tremolo bar really opens up the way I can play and how I approach the guitar. I find bending to be really powerful; you can use it to emulate the human voice when you have the ability to do slight bends down as well as up." *G*

Slothrust's *The Pact* is out on Dangerbird Records

THE PLAYLIST

© Getty Images

ALBUM SPOTLIGHT

BLOOD RED SHOES GET TRAGIC

INTERVIEW JOSH GARDNER

As the Brighton rock duo return with their first new album since 2014, frontwoman Laura-Mary Carter shares her guitar highlights from the new LP…

The genesis of Blood Red Shoes' first album in five years was born out of the burnout that guitarist Laura-Mary Carter and drummer Steven Ansell felt amid the relentless touring supporting their 2014 self-titled record.

Exhausted, the pair decided to take a jump into the unknown – ditching their strict duo format for a more layered and expansive sound that makes their fifth studio album, *Get Tragic*, their most ambitious yet. Ahead of its release, we asked Carter to pick out her five guitar highlights from the powerful and dynamic new long-player.

ELIJAH

"The main heavy riff here was really enjoyable to record; I wanted it as heavy and as dirty as possible. I used a combination of pedals, but I'm sure I used some kind of octave pedal… possibly my EHX MicroSynth – then double-tracked it. The ending is my favourite, I just let rip and whatever came out was left on the recording. I wanted it to sound as free as possible, especially as it's the last thing you hear on the record, it made sense to end it wild like that, because that's sometimes how I feel!"

BEVERLY

"The chorus riff I wrote and recorded on my 60s Teisco, I call it my 'trash guitar', which I found on eBay six years ago. It has this incredible bass tone, so it really worked on this recording to create that warm fuzzy sound. I split it up into two parts when recording layering the higher notes with slightly different tones. I wanted to create a mysterious feel, like it could fit into a Nick Cave or Mark Lanegan album."

MEXICAN DRESS

"The instrumental towards the end of the track has these intense manipulated guitar sounds, which was me playing a Tele run through a Moogerfooger. I wanted this moment to sound climatic but synth-like, I have a habit of making the guitar sound like a synth, so this is a prime example."

EYE TO EYE

"The last chorus is this passing single-note guitar line which, in my head, I imagined was a violin part, it's just a small touch but one I am super happy with. I'd really miss it if it wasn't there. I played my faithful Telecaster and using a one-off reverb pedal, which was made and given to me by a fan in Russia."

FIND MY OWN REMORSE

"I think my favourite guitar moment personally is in this song. It's not what you would expect me to pick, but it's a moment around 2:50 where it breaks down into these really pretty layers that are spacey and almost My Bloody Valentine-esque, which swells and leads into an instrumental. Every time I hear it, I get emotional and I think that sums up how I think and feel about guitar because for me, it's about the vibe more than anything else. I used a Strymon BlueSky and it's actually the demo take – I didn't feel the need to recreate it in the studio, as it was already all there." ***G***

Blood Red Shoes' new album, *Get Tragic*, is out now on Jazz Life/V2

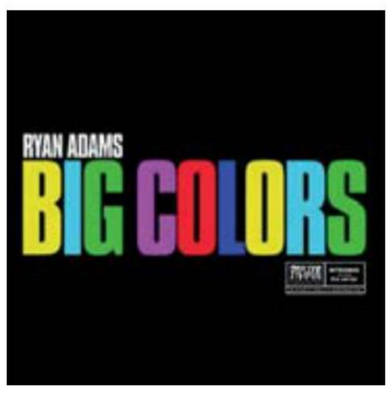
This month's essential tracks for guitar lovers…

GARY CLARK JR
This Land
The title track from the Texan bluesman's new album sees Clark referencing hip-hop, reggae and more, but with the bedrock of his searing wah-and-fuzz fuelled guitar lines.

THE RACONTEURS
Sunday Driver
The first new Raconteurs material in over a decade is a tonic for anyone feeling like Jack White went a little too far off the reservation with his last solo record.

STRAND OF OAKS
Weird Ways
On forthcoming release *Eraserland*, Timothy Showalter's folk-rock project gets an injection of scuzzy power thanks to backing from indie-rockers My Morning Jacket.

TEDESCHI TRUCKS BAND
Hard Case
Featuring omnivorous musical appetites and world-beating slide guitar, TTB's lyrics take on a new maturity, tackling the global climate with an honesty that promises the band's best LP since *Revelator*.



RYAN ADAMS
Doylestown Girl
Doylestown Girl, a song about the Pennsylvania town of the same name, still maintains the open-road Americana feel of Adams' recent LPs, with more bittersweet melodies and summery interludes.

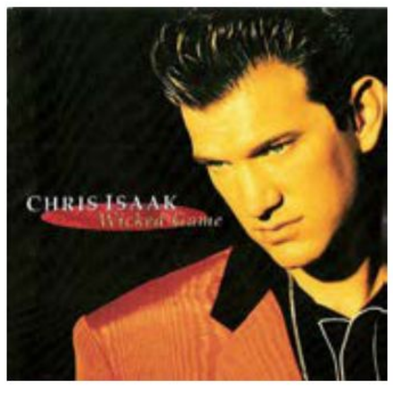
SOAK
Knock Me Off My Feet
Northern Ireland's Bridie Monds-Watson scored a Mercury nomination for her 2015 debut, and if this debut track from her forthcoming follow-up is anything to go by, expect woozy, Cure-inspired dream pop.

RADIOHEAD
Ill Wind
Originally appearing on a CD with the vinyl edition of *A Moon Shaped Pool*, Radiohead have made this brooding B-side with its SNES-style synth and sultry guitar available via all streaming services.

CATFISH AND THE BOTTLEMEN
Longshot
The highly anticipated single is the band's first release in over three years, following 2016's number one album *The Ride*. It's classic Catfish, with everyman lyrics and an immediately memorable chorus.

SLOTHRUST
Double Down
LA alt-rockers Slothrust are the subject of this month's Ones To Watch section over on p12, and the playful lead single *Double Down* from their fourth LP is the perfect gateway to their back catalogue.

IDLES
Danny Nedelko
Bristol-based Idles have now been nominated for this year's BRIT Awards. Fiery single *Danny Nedelko* is a pro-immigration anthem, referencing Freddie Mercury, Mo Farah and Malala Yousafzai along the way.



CHRIS ISAAK
Wicked Game
James Calvin Wilsey, famed for playing the iconic lead guitar on this 1989 Chris Isaak classic, sadly passed away in December, aged 61. Read our tribute to Wilsey's life and music on p18.

NICK WATERHOUSE
Song For Winners
The LA songwriter's eponymous fourth album features 10 new originals, alongside a cover of *I Feel An Urge Coming On* by long-time friend Joshie Jo Armstead, who's previously worked with Ray Charles.

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The El Rey Dorado started out as a limited-run hand-built pedal, but is now in full production. Emulating hard-rock royalty in the form of a Marshall Plexi, the El Rey Dorado's target tone in 'hi' mode is the Super Lead, while switching to 'lo' takes you to JTM45 territory. Featuring three simple controls, in Drive, Tone and Level, this pedal is as solid and scintillating as the amps that inspired it.

Keeley is synonymous with compression, and the Aria is a serious – and seriously versatile – example of the effect. The right-hand side is a direct clone of the Compressor Plus, with the same four knobs for ultimate control. The left features a valve-like drive similar to Keeley's Red Dirt Overdrive. A simple toggle switch lets you change the order of the effects, and you can also place other pedals between the compressor and overdrive using TRS cables.

To find out more about these pedals, read our review on Guitar.com. **G**

To be in with a chance of winning, simply head to the link below and answer the following question: guitar.com/news/competitions/keeleyaria

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A 1999 **B** 2001 **C** 2010

The closing date for the competition is 12:00am GMT, 1 March 2019. Good luck...

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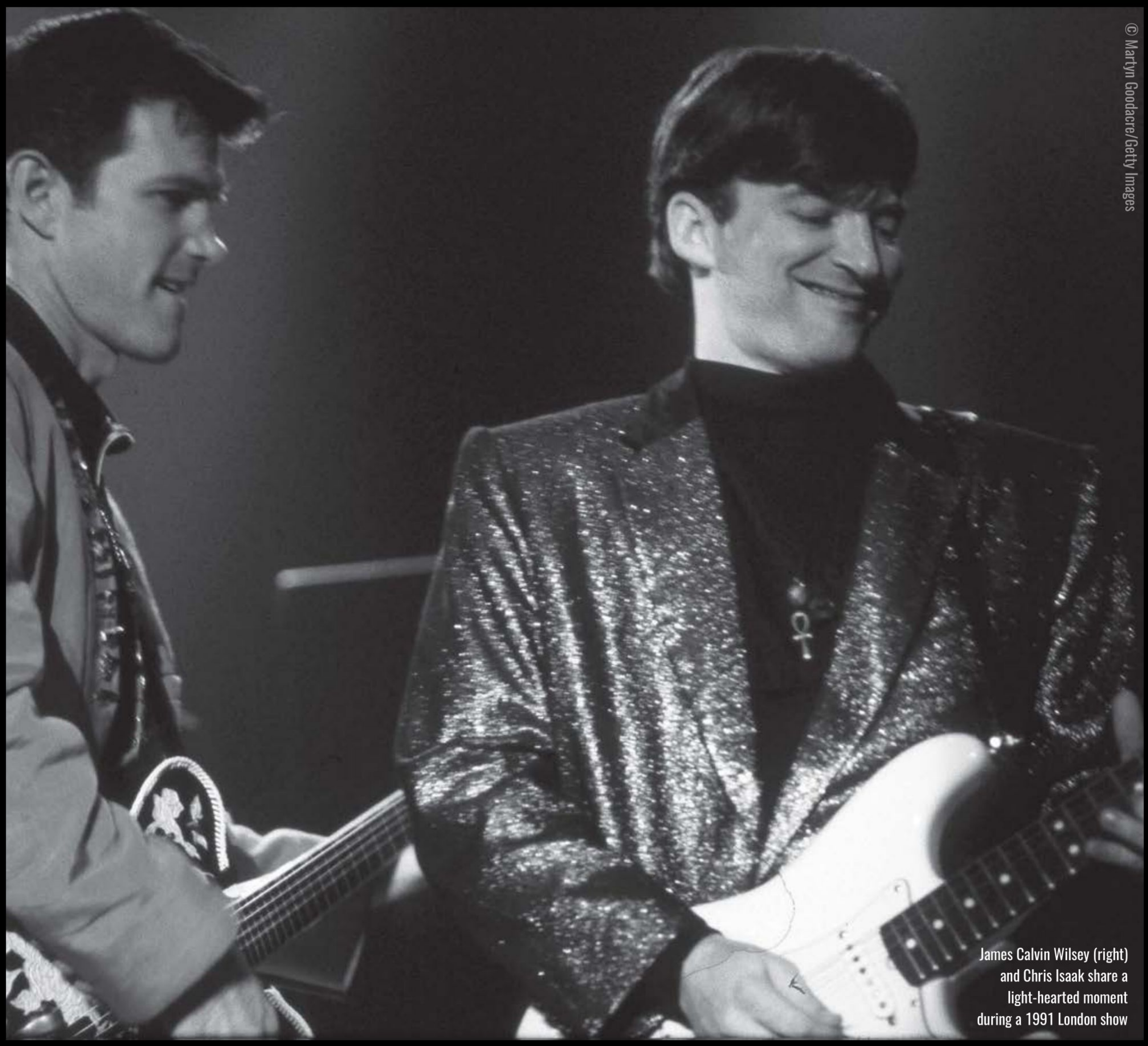

© Martyn Goodacre/Getty Images

James Calvin Wilsey (right) and Chris Isaak share a light-hearted moment during a 1991 London show

JAMES CALVIN WILSEY

12 JULY 1957 – 24 DECEMBER 2018

James Calvin Wilsey, former guitarist for Chris Isaak and solo artist, passed away in December. He was 61. Born in Logansport, Indiana, Wilsey moved to San Francisco and first came to prominence playing bass in short-lived punk group the Avengers, which he joined in 1977.

In 1981, Wilsey's future collaborator Chris Isaak put together a rockabilly combo called Silvertone. The band regularly played San Francisco punk club Mabuhay Gardens, where the soundman would show Isaak guitar licks.

As *Rollling Stone* put it: "Finally, Isaak decided it made more sense for the soundman to play the licks himself, and thus Jimmy Wilsey, one of the most gifted rock 'n' roll guitarists to come along since Robbie Robertson, joined Silvertone."

Wilsey's last album with Isaak was 1993's *San Francisco Days*, but he'll be best remembered for 1989 single *Wicked Game* which featured in David Lynch film *Wild At Heart* the following year and became Isaak's first hit. Wilsey's Strat playing – comped together from eerie vibrato swoops, ghostly legato surf motifs and languid arpeggios sketching out the song's chord progression, then treated with reverb, delay and chorus – is one of the most memorable guitar performances of its era.

Wilsey kept a relatively low profile after parting ways with Isaak, only releasing a solitary solo album, *El Dorado*, in 2008 – an all-instrumental affair that saw Wilsey pay homage to the likes of Link Wray, Duane Eddy and James Burton. Just one other track was to follow: an instrumental cover of Johnny Cash's *The Man Comes Around*, which came in 2012 as part of the soundtrack for the Brad Pitt-starring movie, *Killing Them Softly*.

Isaak wrote a moving tribute to Wilsey on Facebook: "He was very quiet, soft spoken but also deadly funny and quick-witted. Nobody made me laugh like Jimmy… I miss him and I'm so glad I had those times with him. I used to yell: 'Sick 'em Cal!' when he took a guitar solo. I'm going to put on an old record and listen to my friend… Rest In Peace James Calvin Wilsey." **G**

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1959 Gibson ES-175D Players
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1934 Gibson Super 400

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1962 Gibson Les Paul SG STD Ebony Block
1963 Gibson Les Paul SG STD
1963 Gibson Korina Flying V White

1966 Fender Jazz Bass Sonic Blue MINT
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THE GUITAR INTERVIEW

GARY CLARK JR

Almost a decade on from an incendiary Crossroads Guitar Festival performance that announced him as the saviour of blues guitar, Gary Clark Jr remains an artist who refuses to conform to expectations. On the eve of the arrival of his third major-label studio record, *This Land*, the Grammy-winning Texan tells us a tale of broken hands, baffling bagpipes and his newfound love for the Gibson SG…

WORDS JOSH GARDNER | **PHOTOGRAPHY** RYAN HAFFENDEN

ABOVE The Fulltone Octafuzz has been Clark's sidekick for years, and both it and the Zendrive featured heavily on his new album, *This Land*

PREVIOUS SPREAD Clark's new triple-P-90 SG is a collaboration with Gibson, who said: "Well, we've never done that before..."

Gary Clark Jr is back in his hometown of Austin, Texas for a sold-out three-night stint at the Moody Theater, and as we catch up with the guitarist in the afternoon before his opening hometown gig, if he's feeling the pressure of playing in front of nearly 9,000 of his compatriots, he's certainly not showing it. "It's nice to be back in Austin," the 34-year-old reflects, nonchalantly. "I don't get back here a lot, so it's great to hang out, y'know?"

Clark earned his blues-guitar stripes in the clubs and bars of Austin's famous blues scene, following in the legendary footsteps of the likes of Stevie Ray Vaughan, Jimmie Vaughan, Johnny Winter and many others. But while Clark has become the modern standard-bearer for Austin's blues spawning ground, his family name has long been part of the city's musical firmament, thanks to his cousin WC Clark, the 'godfather of Austin blues' and one-time bandmate of Stevie Ray Vaughan. Though surprisingly, Clark Jr wasn't even aware the two were related until he was already far down his musical path.

"Yeah, yeah, I'm related to WC," Clark confirms. "Unfortunately, we aren't as close as you might think, given that we're both in music. I remember I went with my dad to see him at a place called Momo in Austin, because I'd heard about what a good player he was and I knew all about his history in the Triple Threat Revue with Stevie Ray Vaughan and Lou Ann Barton. And so I thought, 'Well, he's called Clark too, I'll check him out!'

"So we went along and we got talking to him after the show, and we ended up talking about family, where we were from and all that stuff and a mutual relation came up. They used to call him 'California' and WC was like: 'You know California?!' and my dad's like: 'Yeah, that's my dad!' and it all went on from there. It's funny how I found out, and I'm glad that I did. But it's the nature of what we do, the fact that we're both working means we don't get much chance to catch up."

THE KING AND I

Clark's immediate family might not have been musicians, but he still came from a musical home, and it wasn't long before a young Gary became fascinated by the instrument that would come to define his life. "I've always been interested in the guitar, and my dad had a few of them in the house when I was growing up," he recalls. "I actually dinged one of them when I was trying to sneak a go on it once. I'd snuck it away

and tried to play it, but then when I came to try to put it back on the stand it just fell off and hit the floor and… crack!"

Despite being a child of the early-to-mid 90s, however, it wasn't the visceral power of grunge or the experimentalism of indie-rock that first captivated Gary in his formative years…

"I remember watching videos of Michael Jackson live, when he had Jennifer Batten playing guitar for him – and she had this crazy guitar and lights in her hair and was doing all this killer guitar," he enthuses. "But even before that, Tito Jackson… I was a huge Michael Jackson fan but also of The Jackson 5. I loved watching the old clips, and Tito there with this big red Gibson, playing off Jermaine… that's pretty much the whole reason I wanted to play the guitar… it just took me a while to actually get my hands on one!"

BLAZING A TRAIL

Clark finally got his hands on a guitar legitimately at the age of 12, and soon after, found himself the proud owner of an electric of his very own, though it was perhaps not the perfect instrument for an aspiring bluesman… "The first guitar that was actually mine was an Ibanez RX20 – black, maple neck, couple of humbuckers, nothing crazy," he explains. "I feel bad because I've got much respect for Ibanez, but a couple of years ago, someone asked me if it was a good guitar, and I said: 'No! But it was a great guitar, because it was *mine*!' Y'know, objectively, it wasn't a quality instrument… it really wasn't all that, but it opened up a whole new world to me and changed my life forever, so shout out to Ibanez, I meant no disrespect!"

Indeed, the young Clark was certainly taken by the Japanese brand at this early stage, but as a devotee of Hendrix and SRV, he needed something that was a little bit less 'hair metal'…

"For my first proper guitar, I stuck with Ibanez, and I got an Ibanez Blazer," he recalls warmly. "That had the coil tap on it, so I could switch between the humbucker and a single coil, it was this beautiful sunburst, rosewood neck… I was into a lot of Stevie Ray Vaughan at the time and I couldn't get one of those signature models, but this got me close enough, y'know? I could finally get those single-coil tones of a Hendrix or a Stevie or the early Buddy Guy, but then I could flip that switch and do that powerchord thing, play my rock 'n' roll music! I've actually still got it – I got it from my parents' house, dusted it off, and it still works for me.

"The gigs, the conversations, the people I've played it with on stage – Clapton, Jimmie Vaughan, Hubert

Octafuzz

Sumlin, Eric Johnson… all came from this guitar. It's still got that old blues-club musk on it – it's had beer spilled on it, smoke on it… it's unique."

PAYING YOUR DUES

Speaking of Clapton, it's nearly a decade now since the moment that took Clark from working the blues clubs in Austin relentlessly to a major-label record deal, headline shows in huge theatres and a Grammy Award – an explosive performance that lit up Eric Clapton's 2010 Crossroads Guitar Festival in Chicago. Watching the performance on YouTube today, you can see exactly why his searing, fuzz-laden performance of *Bright Lights* convinced so many that they were witnessing the arrival of generational guitar talent… but in fact, before he'd been invited to play, Clark was starting to wonder for the first time whether he had to accept that it was time to get a regular job.

"Nobody could tell me that it wasn't going to work, and I was doing okay at times. I was making a living, and I got some acting gigs here and there, which would give me a bit of money to tide me over," he remembers. "But I didn't want to get a job, because the time that I wasn't on stage, I was trying to write songs, or learn to be a better drummer, or how to work drum machines, or be a DJ, how to work Pro Tools… because I just wanted to work in music so much. I was just living the textbook life of a struggling musician.

"There was this woman called Claire who let me live in this house and use it as a studio. And I was late paying my rent because I'd bought some gear, but God bless Claire, she's a beautiful woman, and to this day, I owe her the world. So I'd bought a recorder to work on my hooks and stuff, try to be a bit more professional… and then as soon as I started working with it, my power got cut!

"But then the next day, Doyle Bramhall calls me up and says: 'Hey, I think Clapton's going to invite you to the Crossroads Festival.' And it happened just like that! The night before I'd been sitting in the dark, all I had was candles, thinking, 'I don't know, maybe I'm going to have to do something else.' Because I was getting older, y'know? It's like, that was cute when you were younger, but now you're 25 or 26, it's time to figure it out. Maybe you're done. And then the next thing I know, this letter arrives in the mail and it's like, 'Well I guess I'm not done!'"

OUTSTANDING AT THE CROSSROADS

The Crossroads performance catapulted Clark to stardom. Soon, he would count the likes of Keith Richards, BB King and even Barack Obama as fans, and he made the jump from playing legendary Austin blues club Antone's (which Clark now part-owns) to playing Coachella and joining Clapton on stage at the Royal Albert Hall.

Slowhand was so struck by the young guitarist's performance that he famously wrote him a letter afterwards, saying: 'Thank you – you make me want to play again.' Buddy Guy has said of Clark that: "He's as good as it gets," and the aforementioned 44th President hailed him as: "The future of music."

Being told all that before your first major-label album even comes out seems like a lot to put on a young guitar player, but Clark insists that he was always driven enough to not give it much thought. "I don't really pay much attention to it," he insists. "I understand what it is, but I don't let it affect me. I don't sit around here thinking about myself in those terms! [laughs] I put enough pressure on myself to be the best that I can be, and I also feel like I have

CLAPTON WROTE CLARK A LETTER SAYING: 'THANK YOU – YOU MAKE ME WANT TO PLAY AGAIN,' AND BARACK OBAMA HAILED HIM AS "THE FUTURE OF MUSIC"

ABOVE The combination of Clark's iconic Epiphone Casinos and fuzz pedals was causing him "a lot of issues"

a responsibility to my family to look after them and make sure they're provided for.

"So I put pressure on myself just to make sure that they're all okay and that I'm making the best music I can make, and that I hopefully can relate to as many people as I can. But when people talk about all that stuff, I don't really follow along with the hype, y'know? It's hard enough out here!"

BLUES POWER

Perhaps because he's always been determined to forge his own path and ignore what others expect him to do that Clark has never made a straight-up blues album – instead seeking to fuse roots music with rock, soul, R&B, hip-hop and more. With this in mind, we can't help but wonder if he would find making a straight-ahead blues record a little dull by comparison.

“I WENT THROUGH THIS BOX OF STUFF ONCE AND FOUND SOME BAGPIPES. IT WAS LIKE, ‘WHY DO I HAVE BAGPIPES!?’ BUT ANYTHING THAT MADE NOISE, I WANTED TO MESS WITH IT!”

ABOVE A Fender Vibro-King combo was Clark’s first valve amp, and this 20th Anniversary Edition Vibro-King head with matching 2x12 cabinet has seen plenty of action

“It’s not boring to me,” he explains. “It’s just that I spent a lot of time as a young guy playing ‘traditional’ blues. That’s how you learn – mimicking the greats. But I was doing all this other stuff as well. I was messing around with turntables and learning to make beats, I was picking up trumpets, trying to figure out the saxophone, the piano… anything I could use to make music. I went through this box of stuff once and found some bagpipes. It was like, ‘why do I have *bagpipes*!?’ But anything that made noise, I wanted to mess with it! I was very experimental. And growing up in the 80s, 90s and 2000s, there was this whole world that I could access through the internet, so it’s not like I was just hearing blues. I was just doing my own thing.

“I think as I get older and you go through life’s twists and turns, I could sit back and write a super-legit blues album that’s original and vibey. But for the time being, there’s all this technology and different instruments and sounds that people are making and I just want to get up in that right now – that’s what keeps me interested and engaged.”

LAND OF PLENTY

All of which brings us to *This Land*, Clark’s third major-label release, and his first since 2015’s *The Story Of Sonny Boy Slim*. It’s a powerful, raw album that fuses together blues, soul, jazz, hip-hop and rock ’n’ roll as the vehicle for lyrics that paint an uncompromising picture of an American society that’s fractured and dissatisfied.

Roots music and cultural commentary have long gone hand in hand, but it’s still refreshing to hear an artist speak so frankly and emotionally about the world outside his door. Despite this, Clark insists that the political events of the last few years didn’t compel him to write songs such as the angry, frustrated call-to-arms of the album’s title track.

“I didn’t feel like I had to do it at all, it’s just that I was feeling that kind of way, and after the past year it’s hard not to,” he elaborates. “With what’s on the news and everything, it brought up a lot of those kinds of feelings and thoughts, it’s scary.

“It’s not necessarily about politics, it’s just about being a human being. So yeah, I’ve made a record that’s referencing Trump, but that’s just because I was making it around the election and everything, and those were the sounds I was hearing where I was. It’s not a political statement, it’s more like, ‘yeah, I’m a human being, this is where I am, I have a life like everyone else.’ We’re all of us just trying to make the best life that we can, but we need to all be given the same chance, and the same opportunities, so that we can work hard and make something together, and then maybe we’ll be all good.”

There’s always been an edge to Clark’s sound both live and in the studio, but *This Land* feels even more raw. We can’t help but wonder if the subject matter played a part on giving songs like the Fulltone Octafuzz-laden *Pearl Cadillac* such jagged energy, but it turns out the reality is a lot more mechanical… “I think that had a little bit to do with the fact that I actually made a good chunk of the record with a broken hand,” he explains. “That meant that when the time came, I had to really *play*. Instead of just play or sing the notes like I had on other records, I wanted to feel it. I wanted it to translate. I was really adamant with [producer] Jacob Sciba, whereas usually I’m really laid back and: ‘Well, you know this better than me!’ but this time I was like: ‘No, I want to feel this like I feel it when I’m playing it. I don’t want there to

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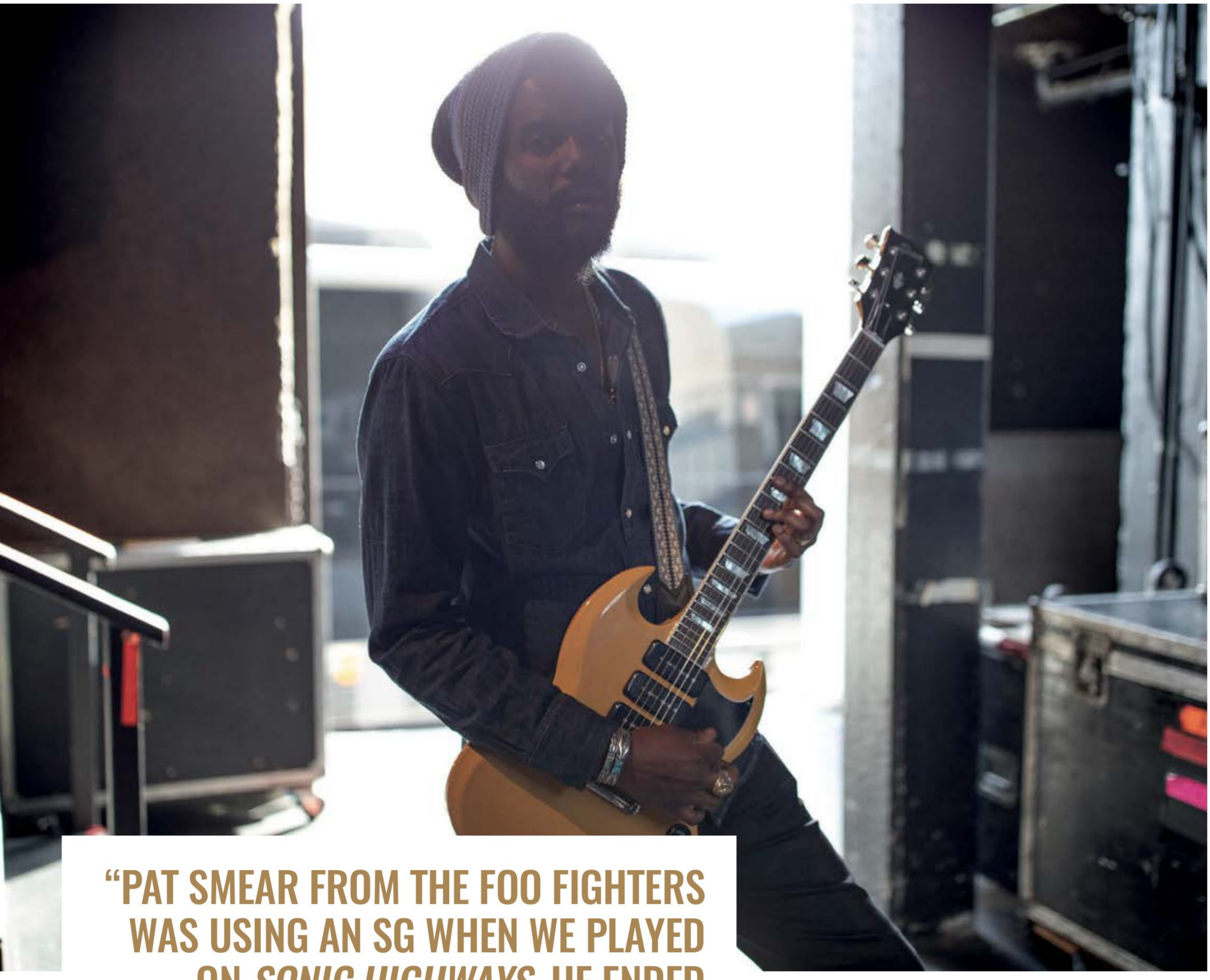

"PAT SMEAR FROM THE FOO FIGHTERS WAS USING AN SG WHEN WE PLAYED ON *SONIC HIGHWAYS*. HE ENDED UP GIVING ME THE GUITAR AND I JUST FELL IN LOVE WITH IT"

ABOVE *This Land*'s politically charged title track is the album's lead single

be anything lost in translation.' And his response was: 'Well you'd better sing your ass off, and play your ass off!'"

CASINO JACKPOT

When it comes to his choice of instruments, Clark has become almost synonymous with the Epiphone Casino, even getting a signature 'Blak & Blu' model from the company in 2015, but his relationship with the instrument came around by happenstance.

"I was playing Strats for a while, maybe from 2000 until 2008 or 2009? But everyone around Austin was playing Strats!" he laughs. "Everyone was playing a Strat with like, a Twin or a Super Reverb, and I was just done with it. Then I thought back to Tito Jackson and that beautiful red Gibson… and so I went up to this shop called Musicmakers in Austin and they had this beautiful Cherry red Casino in there. So I plugged it into a Princeton, said: 'Yup!', took it home with me, and that was it."

For *This Land*, however, he's abandoned his longtime hollowbody sidekick in favour of a P-90-loaded Gibson SG that became the primary voice of *This Land*. "I never thought that I would play an SG at all," Clark exclaims. "But Pat Smear from the Foo Fighters, he was using one when we played on a record together, called *Sonic Highways*. He ended up giving me the guitar and I just fell in love with it. It's so light, and it has a nasty edge that I'd never experienced before, so I got into 'em!

"And then one day, my guitar tech Dave called me and said: 'I wonder what it would be like if we put three P-90s in an SG?' So we shot it over to Gibson, and they said: 'Well, we've never done that before…' but it turned out even better than we thought.

"With my Casino, I was having a lot of issues with feedback. Feedback and fuzz pedals is cool sometimes… but a lot of times, it'd be out of my control and it would become somewhat problematic, considering the volumes we're working at. They were like: 'Well, you could sacrifice the volume…' Nahhhhhh [laughs]. So here we are with the SG!" **G**

Gary Clark Jr's *This Land* is out 1 March 2019 on Warner Music. Instagram, Twitter and Facebook: @garyclarkjr

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SIGNS OF THE TIMES

Derek Trucks has developed from child prodigy into the world's finest slide guitarist. We spoke to the bottleneck virtuoso about the Tedeschi Trucks Band's fourth studio album, his pursuit of pure tone, his blend of rootsy blues with all manner of different music styles and Willie Nelson's penchant for gypsy jazz…

WORDS SAM ROBERTS | **PHOTOGRAPHY** SHERVIN LAINEZ

Derek Trucks isn't your average guitar player. Since his debut album in 1997, he's built up an enviable back catalogue of stellar studio and live records, winning a Grammy Award in 2009 for *Already Free* and another for the Tedeschi Trucks Band's 2012 album, *Revelator*. Along the way, he's steadily evolved from jam-band beginnings to spearheading his current road-honed 12-piece line-up, where he shares the limelight with his wife, vocalist and guitarist Susan Tedeschi. The Jacksonville native can also lay claim to being a member of The Allman Brothers Band and Eric Clapton's touring entourage; all by the age of just 39.

Despite a tumultuous few years both on and off the stage, due to the loss of Greg Allman and long-time friend and collaborator Colonel Bruce Hampton, when we speak, he's in remarkably good spirits. This infectious attitude is due in part to forthcoming studio album *Signs*, his fourth under the Tedeschi Trucks Band monicker, which sees him revisit analogue tape for the first time since the 1990s, accompanied by another world tour which includes sold-out shows at London's Palladium. *Signs* again showcases the band's desire to push the boundaries of roots music, incorporating influences from Qawwali music and delivering lyrics referencing the current global political landscape.

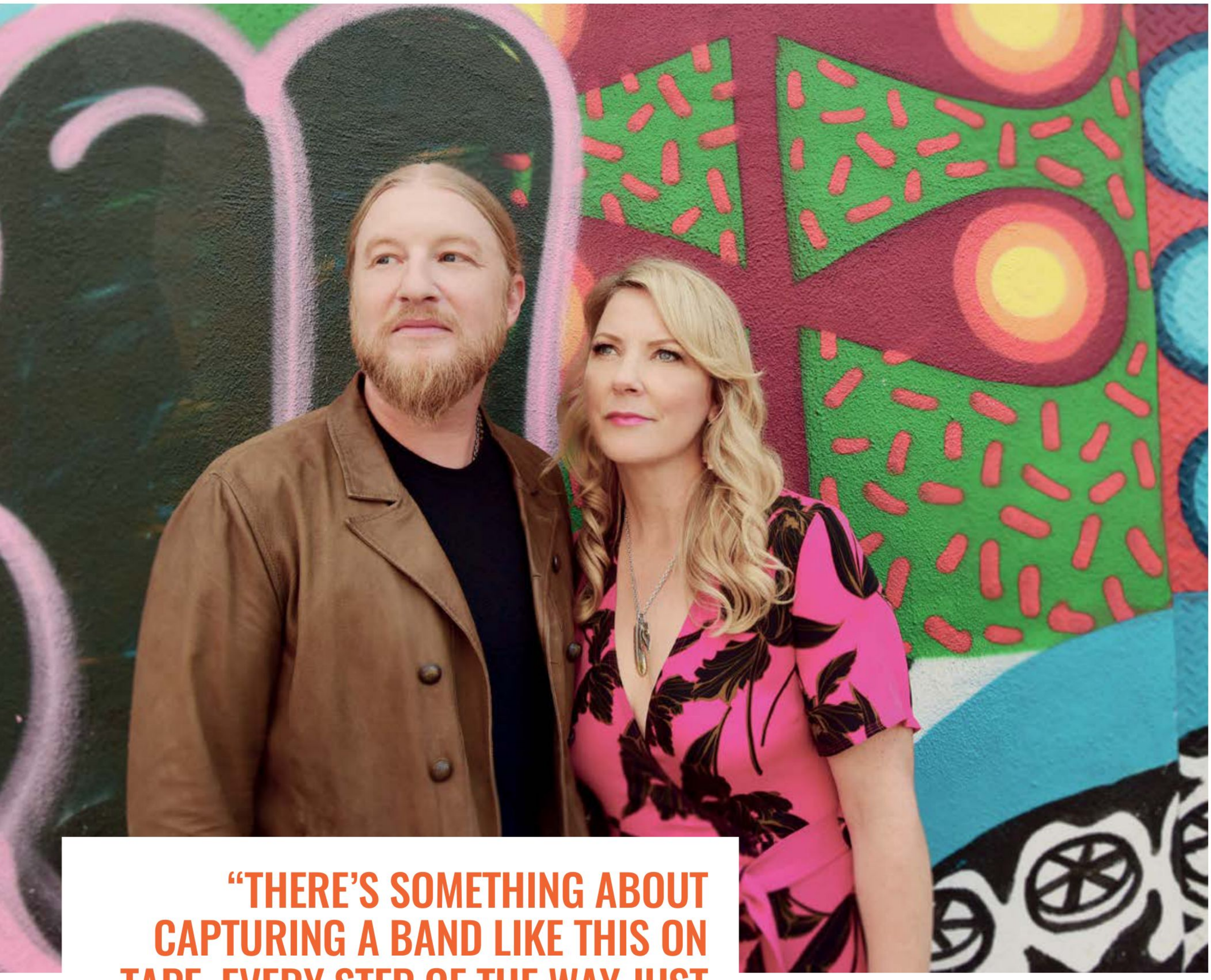
Alongside the aforementioned touring stints, Trucks has also played with Willie Nelson, Bob Dylan and the late, great BB King. Upon hearing a solo from Trucks, King exclaimed: "That's the best I've ever heard it." During our conversation, it becomes abundantly clear why Trucks remains so consistently loved by his peers…

Are you pleased with how the new album turned out?
"Whenever we're making a record, we put everything into it for however long it takes, cut it loose then start thinking about the next one! I've listened to this one a few times since and it feels very honest. I like the way the band revolves around songwriting, I enjoy that process more as time goes on."

What can fans expect from *Signs*?
"Our band is always in transition, because it's such a big group of personalities, musically or otherwise. You put a record out and you have to tour hard, but we're

ABOVE The Tedeschi Trucks Band's fourth studio album, *Signs*, is out in February

OPPOSITE The iconic sight of Derek Trucks in full flight with his SG, the model with which he's become synonymous



“THERE’S SOMETHING ABOUT CAPTURING A BAND LIKE THIS ON TAPE, EVERY STEP OF THE WAY JUST FELT BETTER. THERE WAS DEFINITELY MORE MEAT ON THE BONE”

OPPOSITE PAGE Though primarily a slide player, Trucks also plays fingerstyle (still in his favoured open E tuning)

always looking forward to getting back into the studio and getting into that head space. There’s a lot of pent-up energy to play stuff that we’ve been holding back.”

Lyrically, you address political turmoil in the US and global environmental concerns. Can you tell us more about the emotional frustrations behind the lyrics?
“I think you’re always trying to tap into what you’re feeling as an individual. Right now, you can feel the whole world’s head is spinning. If you duck away from that, you’re BS-ing everybody! When you think of your favourite songwriters, like civil-rights-era Bob Dylan, it’s not overt; you can read the tea leaves. It’s important not to preach at people, but when you’re writing records, you want them to last.”

You’ve said this was an emotional record, due to the passing of friends and family members. Has that come out in the finished product?
“Without a doubt. When we were writing, we were doing it right in the thick of it, there was a lot going on. You can’t compartmentalise it. The type of music we play, just trying to be honest in the way you sing or perform is inevitable. You can feel it hanging over the record, but at the same time, you don’t want it to drag the whole thing down.

“These things strengthen what remains. That [‘Strengthen What Remains’] almost became the album title, actually. It summed up where our heads were. I remember Bruce Hampton saying when everything was hitting the fan: ‘Well, music is important again!’.”

On *Signs*, you have collaborators and friends Warren Haynes and Doyle Bramhall II involved. How does this family approach impact the songwriting process?
“Since we built our studio, Doyle comes down for every album cycle. It’s always a creative relief, because he’s a songwriting machine. We do that about every year and a half to keep the wheels turning. With Warren, it’s more off-the-cuff. He happened to be in Nashville and came by the studio, we played him *Walk Through This Life* and he added some harmony

parts. He's from the Carolina mountains and has that bluegrass thing, which is something you can't fake!"

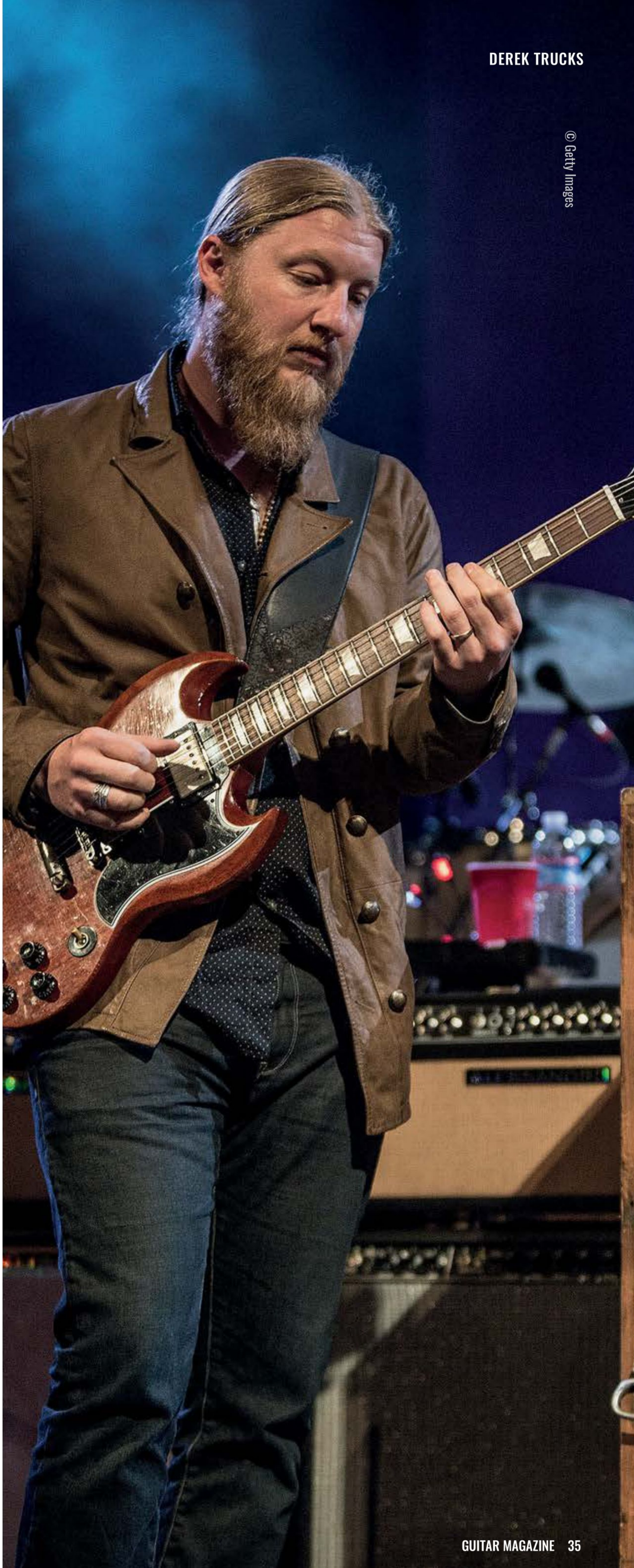
You chose to record to two-inch tape on this record and worked with Jim Scott again. Does that change the recording process?
"It's different. We've always tried to mix back to tape, but recording directly makes everything feel more important. If you want to re-do it, you have to rewind the tape, so everything takes longer. It was refreshing because the first records I made were all to tape, then it became a very boutique thing due to the ease of Pro Tools. You start to remember how it felt to make records back then, it took longer! When the machine breaks you have to stop the whole thing and fix it, so it focused everybody. There's something about capturing a band like this on tape, every step of the way just felt better. There was definitely more meat on the bone."

Did that change your approach to recording guitar?
"With digital, you can overdub 50 times and splice it, so we really avoided that mindset. Any time you want to take a stab at a solo or an overdub, it's a little more like you would approach it live. You don't want to waste anyone's time or energy… or tape!"

Your band now has 12 members… most bands struggle to keep four members happy for several years! How do you keep the dynamic healthy and maintain momentum?
"Like anything else, you have to work at it. It's been incredibly consistent, considering how big the band is. You also have to take into account that there's a lot of personalities. Not everyone is built for a group dynamic, but for the most part, the band's an incredibly healthy entity."

That being said, you've just announced the departure of bassist Tim Lefebvre…
"It definitely changes things. We knew from the beginning that Tim always had his hands in a thousand projects. His focus would come and go, but he would always bring it on the bandstand, he was a badass. A lot of great music was written and played with him, but it was good timing, I think everyone is now better off. We've just finished rehearsing with Brandon Boone from Atlanta, who's just 24. It's miraculous how good he sounds, it's a refreshing take on old tunes. You can feel it when the drummers show a sense of relief too, there's a shit-eating grin on their faces!"

Strong dynamics also play a big part in your performances. With such a large band, how do you approach that in a live setting?
"That's something that certain musicians can innately key in, and that's definitely the thing we look for most as a band. Being able to react to when it needs to



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“IT’S AMAZING HAVING A BAND THIS BIG THAT’S LISTENING HARD. IT’S IMPORTANT WE CAN BRING IT DOWN TO A WHISPER, BUT WHEN IT’S TIME TO WE CAN REALLY MOVE SOME AIR”

breathe or when to kick it in its ass. It’s amazing when you have a band this big that’s listening hard. It’s important that we can bring it down to a whisper, but when it’s time to, we can really move some air. As a kid, I loved hearing it, my uncle [Butch Trucks] loved it in the Allman Brothers due to his love of classical music. They had timpanis on the road in a rock band in the 60s!”

Gear-wise, how has your current live setup changed?
“It’s pretty consistent. With my solo band and Eric Clapton, I was plugging an SG straight into a Fender Super Reverb. For this band, George Alessandro offered to build me something with a little more juice, so he built my current amp under his name. It’s similar to a Super Reverb, with more guts. It still has that headroom, so it stays clean longer but can get saturated, too. It doesn’t get lost in the mix so much. Typically though, some nights I’m happy with my setup, then others I want to throw all my shit in the river.”

Does that rig transfer to the studio or do you experiment with different equipment?
“I experiment more with smaller amps in the studio, like Deluxe Reverbs or a Vibrolux. It’s usually Fender amps, but we have a few weird things floating around, too; there’s an Oahu that I love and an Ampeg B-15 that also sounds amazing. That’s the beauty of the studio, you can throw so many sounds against the wall until you find one that sits in a track. I never carry that stuff on the road, unless it’s a smaller set and we take weirder guitars like Teiscos and Kawais. They’ve all got knobs and buttons which I have no idea how to work!”

There are diverse influences in your playing on *Signs*. In the past, you’ve mentioned Ali Akbar Khan, along with Qawwali music, how does this kind of music continue to play a role in your style?
“I still listen to that as much as anything else. I’ve recently brought the sarod back out and restrung it, so I’m now shredding on that as much as guitar. Those ways of approaching the instrument are still a part of it, but I try to incorporate it in ways that are less

ABOVE As we went to press, Kofi Burbridge (flute and keys, second from left) was suffering from health issues, which will sideline him temporarily for 2019’s live dates. We wish him a full and speedy recovery

"I FOUND LISTENING BACK HELPED ME. I ALWAYS IMAGINE IN MY HEAD HOW SOMETHING IS COMING ACROSS AND IT'S NOT NECESSARILY DOING THAT WHEN I LISTEN BACK"

obvious. When I listen to Ali Akbar Khan, it's pure intonation. If I need to get back to ground zero, I'll go back to him or Elmore James."

You draw inspiration from gospel music, too – are there other vocal styles that influence your playing?
"Anything that hits you between the chest. There was a period where I'd listen to every Stevie Wonder record and listen to his vocal approach. I've been listening to a lot of Aretha since her passing, there's so much there that makes you want to play. We also did a few shows with Willie Nelson and seeing him play Django Reinhardt was so refreshing, I was knocked over when he played *Nuages*."

Is there anyone that's really prominent on your radar at the moment?
"I can't say there's a bunch, but that's because my head has been down making this record. My son keeps putting me on to Doyle Bramhall's last album. I think as a guitar player and singer he's now fully formed, so those albums are definitely worth listening to."

Do you have any advice for beginner slide players?
"The first few years I was playing was like hearing your voice on a recording, I found that listening back helped in a lot of ways. I always imagine in my head how something is coming across and it's not necessarily doing that when I listen back. It's good for refining and cleaning things up. It also helps with nerves, it gives you more bravery to let a note or a melody hang out. Listening is so important, sometimes the harsh truth is the best thing for us."

Looking back, is there anything that you'd change to speed up your learning?
"There's always things that you'd tweak, but I feel so lucky to have lived this life so far that I don't know if I'd change any processes. Life is going to deal with us at some point, but how you deal with it is a chance to improve as a musician." ***G***

***Signs* by Tedeschi Trucks Band is out 15 February on Snakefarm Records. See tedeschitrucksband.com for info**

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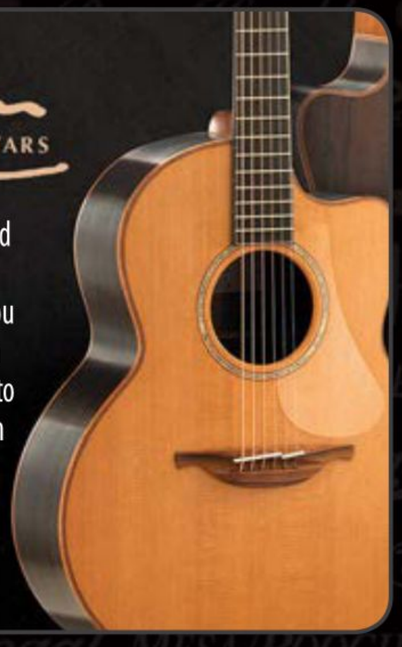

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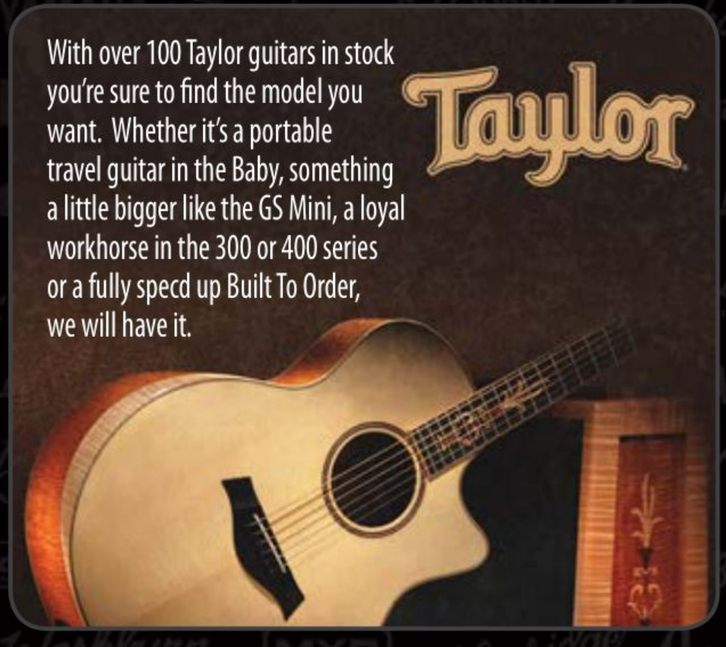

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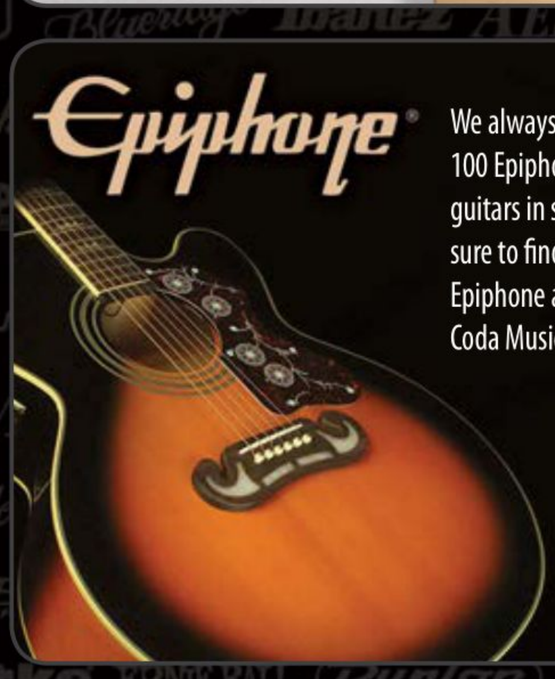

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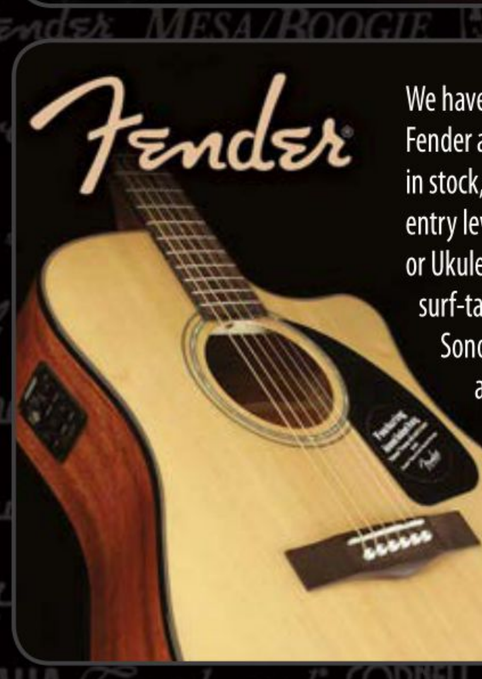

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ERIC GALES

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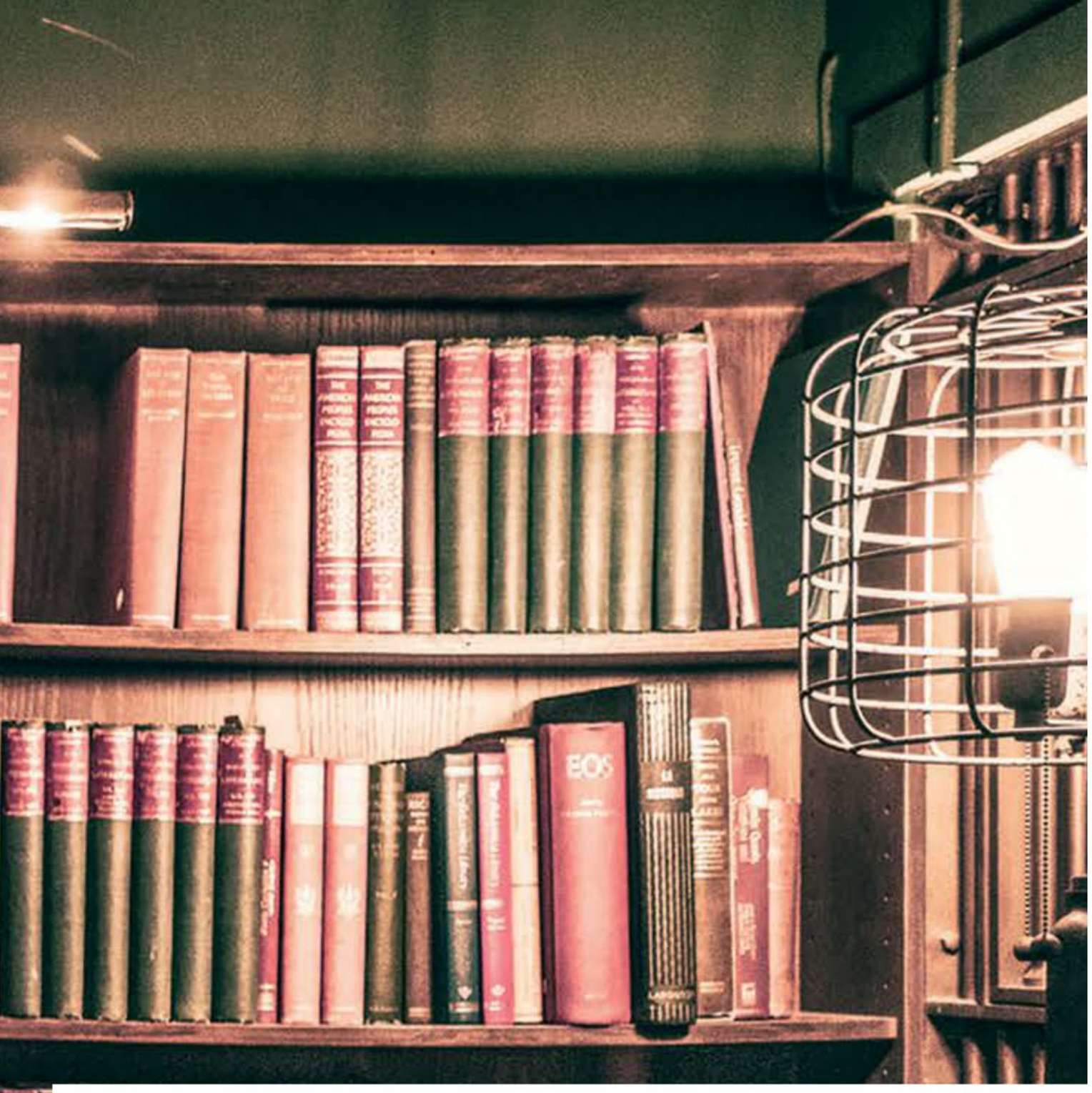
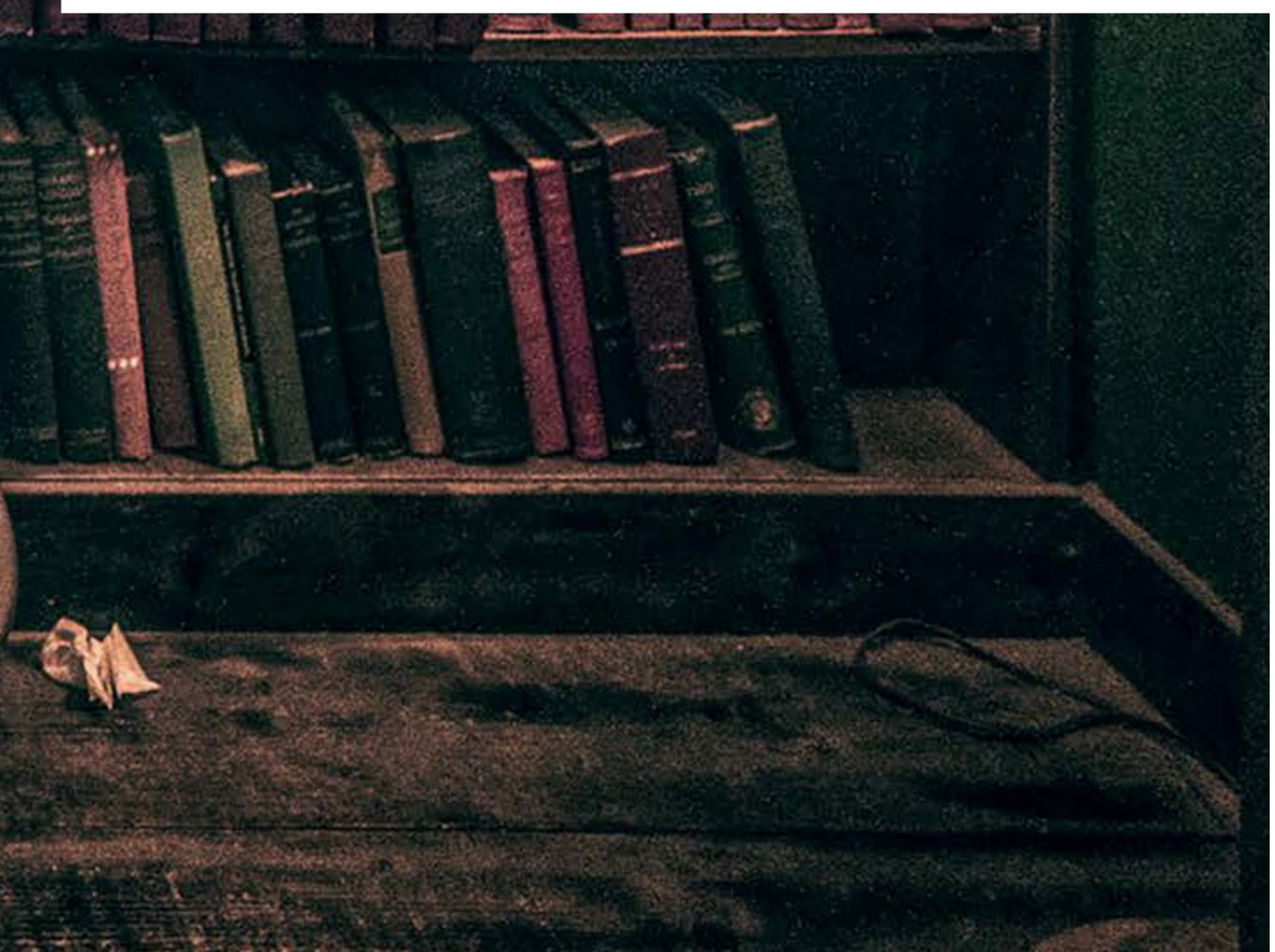


Since he was anointed the ‘next great bluesman’ while still a teenager, things have been far from smooth sailing for Eric Gales. At one point, it seemed as though drug and legal problems would derail his career but in 2017, he returned in stunning form, reminding listeners everywhere that he remains one of the most devastating blues guitarists on the planet. Now, refreshed and reinvigorated, Gales has decided it’s time to show the world how broad his horizons can be…

WORDS JOSH GARDNER | **PHOTOGRAPHY** MATHIEU BITTON

STYLE



Eric Gales has something he’d like to get off his chest. “I’m going to say something for the record,” the 44-year-old exclaims. “I have been labelled as a blues-guitar player, or a blues-rock guitar player… I am a whole lot more than that.” It’s a concept that the Memphis-born guitarist returns to again and again over the course of our conversation, his passion and conviction evident even down a crackly phone line from his recently snowed-in North Carolina home.

And to be honest, who could blame him? Gales supported Santana at Woodstock ’94 at the age of 20, he’s been releasing albums for very nearly 30 years now, and along the way he’s battled addiction and spent time in jail. If after all he’s done and all he’s been through, people are still trying to pigeonhole him as just a blues guitarist, it’s understandable that he’d want to set them straight once and for all.

“There are more vantage points to me than just being a blues guy,” Gales continues. “During my show,

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“I’M INFLUENCED BY A LOT OF DIFFERENT THINGS... I JUST WANTED TO MAKE A RECORD THAT GAVE MUCH MORE TO THE SONG CONTENT, THE LYRIC CONTENT AND MY SINGING”

ABOVE Eric at the Provogue/ Mascot Rockin’ The Blues Festival at The Boerderij, Zoetermeer, Netherlands in March 2018

there might be one song that you’d class as a hardcore, I-IV-V blues thing, but other than that… Yes, you hear the blues influence in everything that I do, because that’s what I am at my core, but there are influences, inspirations and other styles that I also like to visit. Blues, funk, rock, pop… all of it will entail things that are part of me. So it’s difficult for me to say what kind of guitar player I am, because I like everything from gospel to funk to classical to jazz.”

BOOK MARK

Gales’ forthcoming 16th studio album, *The Bookends*, is his most overt example of that. If 2017’s *Middle Of The Road* catapulted him back into the top strata of blues-guitar players, *The Bookends* is the sound of him stretching out and showing what a versatile and eclectic guitar player and musician he can be.

“On this album, I feel like I’ve really let the world know that I’m much more than a I-IV-V blues player – there are many facets to me,” he insists. “I haven’t really shown that basic blues side of me in years. It’s more rock, it’s more pop, it’s more new. New stuff! There’s elements of blues, rock, funk, gospel, a little bit of country, and everything in between.

“Because I’m influenced by a lot of different things, I can’t predict what will come to me at the time, it’s just how I’m feeling. I try to transfer that from my brain to my hands and try to give it everything I have. It just all depends on the mode and the mood I’m in as to what comes out. I can honestly say that I’m never disappointed with what comes out, and it winds up speaking to where my heart is at that moment in time. I just try to dip in and out of different worlds and how I fuse them together is still unknown to me, but I’m glad it works out!”

This diversity is something that Gales obviously is hugely passionate about, so much so that it leads right back to the album’s title… “*The Bookends* is about how I fit everything in between them,” he explains. “It’s about how I was trying to fit these different styles in between two bookends. I’m influenced by a lot of different things, and I just wanted to make a record that gave much more to the song content, the lyric content and my singing, as well as pairing up with

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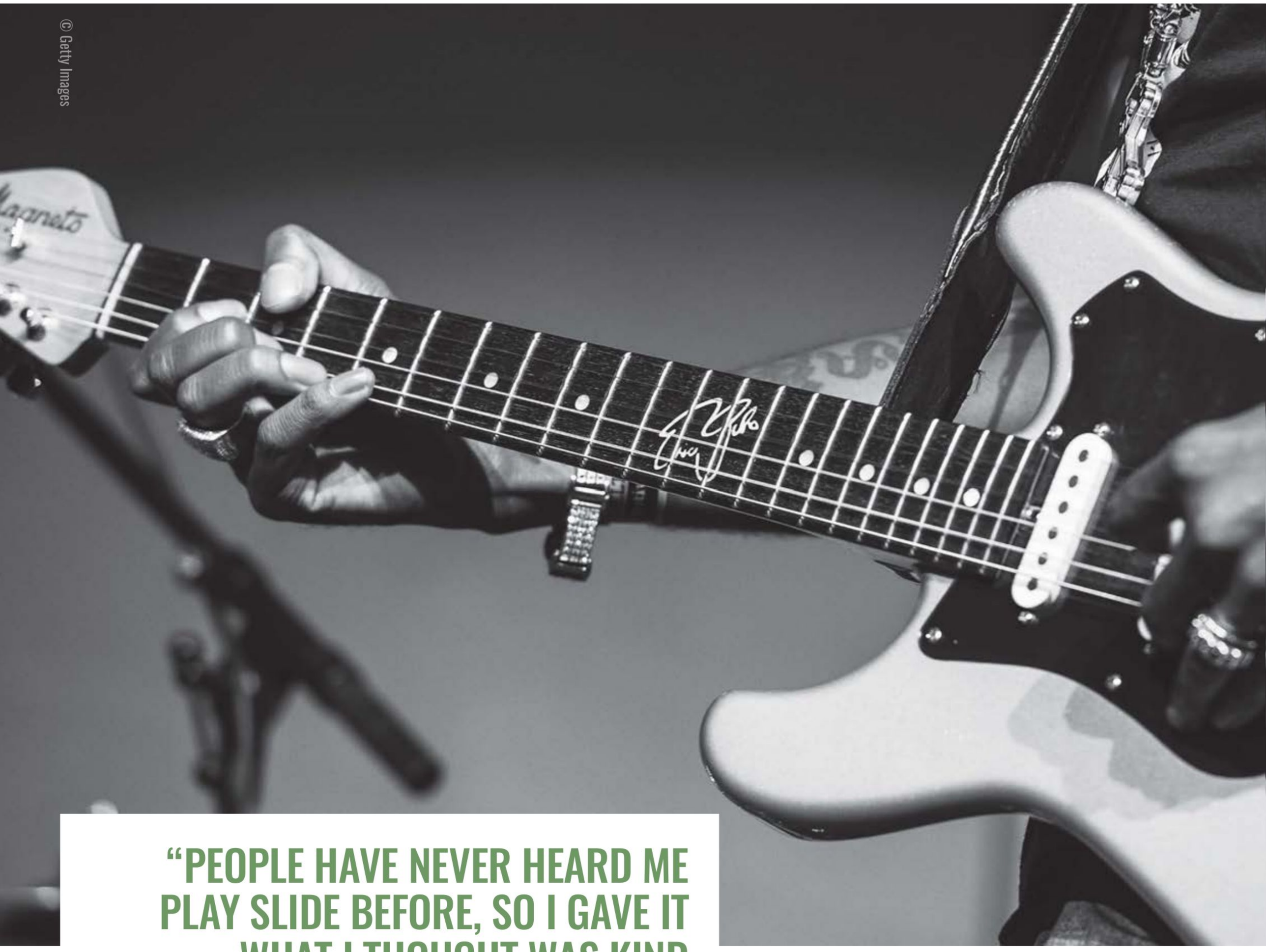

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ABOVE Eric's unconventional guitar style is captured in this live shot – but don't attempt to convert the sounds in your head, it'll tie your brain in knots

"PEOPLE HAVE NEVER HEARD ME PLAY SLIDE BEFORE, SO I GAVE IT WHAT I THOUGHT WAS KIND OF A ROBERT RANDOLPH-Y, DEREK TRUCKS COMBINATION"

people who I'm really influenced by, such as B.Slade, Beth Hart and Doyle Bramhall. All three of them contributed to the record in really powerful ways that made the album what it is."

LEFT TURNS

The aforementioned Doyle Bramhall II is a guest on the appropriately titled *Southpaw Serenade* – a laid-back number that sees the two guitarists weave their contrasting styles together to produce one of the album's most enjoyable moments. "I've known Doyle since he was in Arc Angels, a long time ago, and we have to stick together as we both play left-handed!" Gales jokes. "So I figured, why not get my good friend Doyle to give me a hand? And it turned out wonderfully. It couldn't have turned out no better than what it did! It was great! He did his thing – he came and he brought it, and he gave it, and it gave the song a feel that was like a D'Angelo vibe, and that was another of those things between the bookends that I wanted to touch on."

Speaking of lefties, Gales' style of playing guitar is famously idiosyncratic. Despite being naturally right-handed, he plays the guitar lefty, but upside down, with the strings going from high to low – a style that was also used by his uncle Dempsey Garrett Jr, a righty-playing southpaw who jammed with Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf. We ask if his unconventional style helps him approach the guitar in a different way than he would if he played right-handed. "I wouldn't know!" he exclaims. "I have no way to compare it with how you'd approach things as a right-handed player! I just do what it is that I do and it's unique to everybody else… but to me, it's normal. That said, there definitely is a different approach to how I'm playing compared to people who play right-handed, and that in itself may give me a unique thing in the way that I voice chords or the way that I strum, coming from the top down. But all I know is that it works for me!"

However, despite being in the game for nearly 30 years, Gales still has a few guitar tricks up his sleeve that even his most dedicated fan will never have heard before, most notably on the track *It Just Beez That*

Way, where Eric plays slide guitar on record for the first time.

"*It Just Beez That Way* is a great example of some new stuff, because if people thought they'd heard it all from me, now I come out with the slide, and then incorporate that with the beatboxing and the off-tempo backbeat behind it, it's a really interesting song," he explains.

It's not like Eric had been woodshedding new techniques, though – he'd just never really felt like he wanted to use it on record before. "It's kinda been there in the bag all along," he confirms. "I was trying to think of stuff that I wanted to do that I haven't done before. People have never heard me play slide before, so I gave it what I thought was kind of a Robert Randolph-y, Derek Trucks combination, and I was pleasantly surprised how it turned out!"

MARK OF QUALITY

Despite the varied stylistic places that Gales visited on *The Bookends*, when it came to the gear side of things, he leant on his most trusted and familiar tools. Primarily, it was his Magneto Sonnet Raw Dawg II signature model and a PRS McCarty ("For those humbucker tones") doing the heavy lifting, with a

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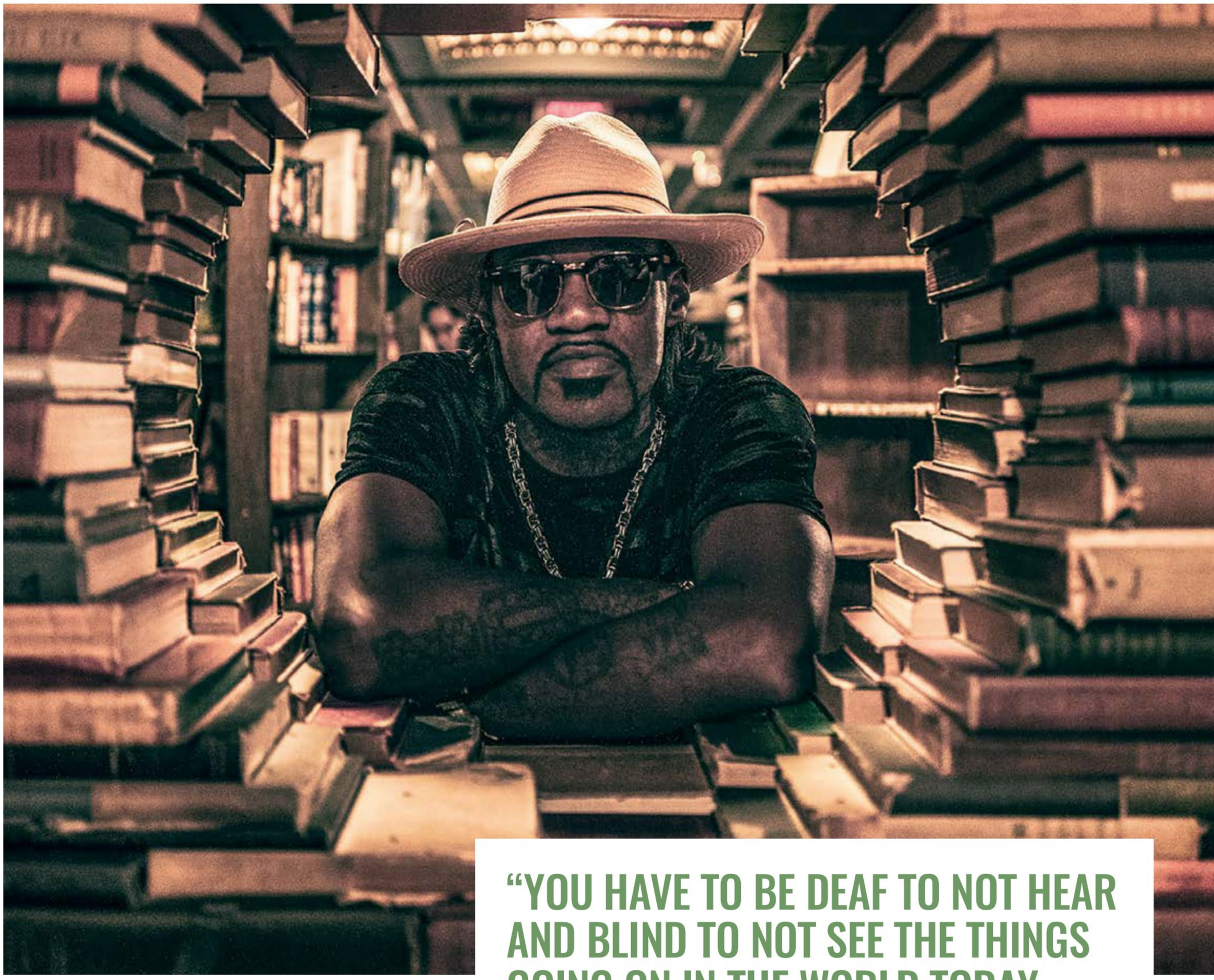

selection of simple pedals including a Tube Screamer, wah and delay, all running into his all-important DV Mark Raw Dawg EG head.

Using a hybrid micro-head made by an Italian maker more famous for its bass gear than scorching blues amps is another unconventional decision by Gales, but he can't speak highly enough of it. "The solid-state is only the power, but the tone is coming from the preamp tube and I think that hybrid thing is just an ingenious," he enthuses. "I'm really in love with the amp, man – it's sounds great, it's lightweight, it's affordable and it's selling off the shelves really well – so much so that we have a new signature combo amp and cabinet coming out soon as well, along with some new Eric Gales signature gear."

USING YOUR VOICE

If creative variety is a musical constant of the record, from a thematic point of view, pleas for social justice, equality and a better world are prominent on the likes of *Something's Gotta Give* and *Reaching For A Change*. In a society that seems to becoming more divided every day, it would be easy for Gales to avoid such polarising sentiments in his music, but his broad influences emboldened him to be more overt.

"YOU HAVE TO BE DEAF TO NOT HEAR AND BLIND TO NOT SEE THE THINGS GOING ON IN THE WORLD TODAY. THESE THINGS ARE VERY PREVALENT AND NEED TO BE SPOKEN ABOUT"

"Seeing how other artists are vocal about things that they want to talk about and don't play it so safe, I took pages from those books," he elaborates. "You have to be deaf to not hear and blind to not see the things that are going on in the world today, these things that are very prevalent and need to be spoken about. And I think as artists we have a very powerful platform that reaches the masses, and I definitely tried to put it in a way that's just, 'Hey, I'm not preaching, I'm not trying to tell everybody what to do, but I'm just making sure that people are aware that something has got to give'.

"And I think that if that song [*Something's Gotta Give*] is listened to and understood by the right amount of people and the correct people, then that song could make a very powerful statement. Something's got to give… with all of the wrongs that are going on in the world today, something has to be done differently. I hope that song can be relatable to people."

FACING PAGE Reflecting the diversity of his style, here's Gales playing the Cheltenham Jazz Festival in May 2018

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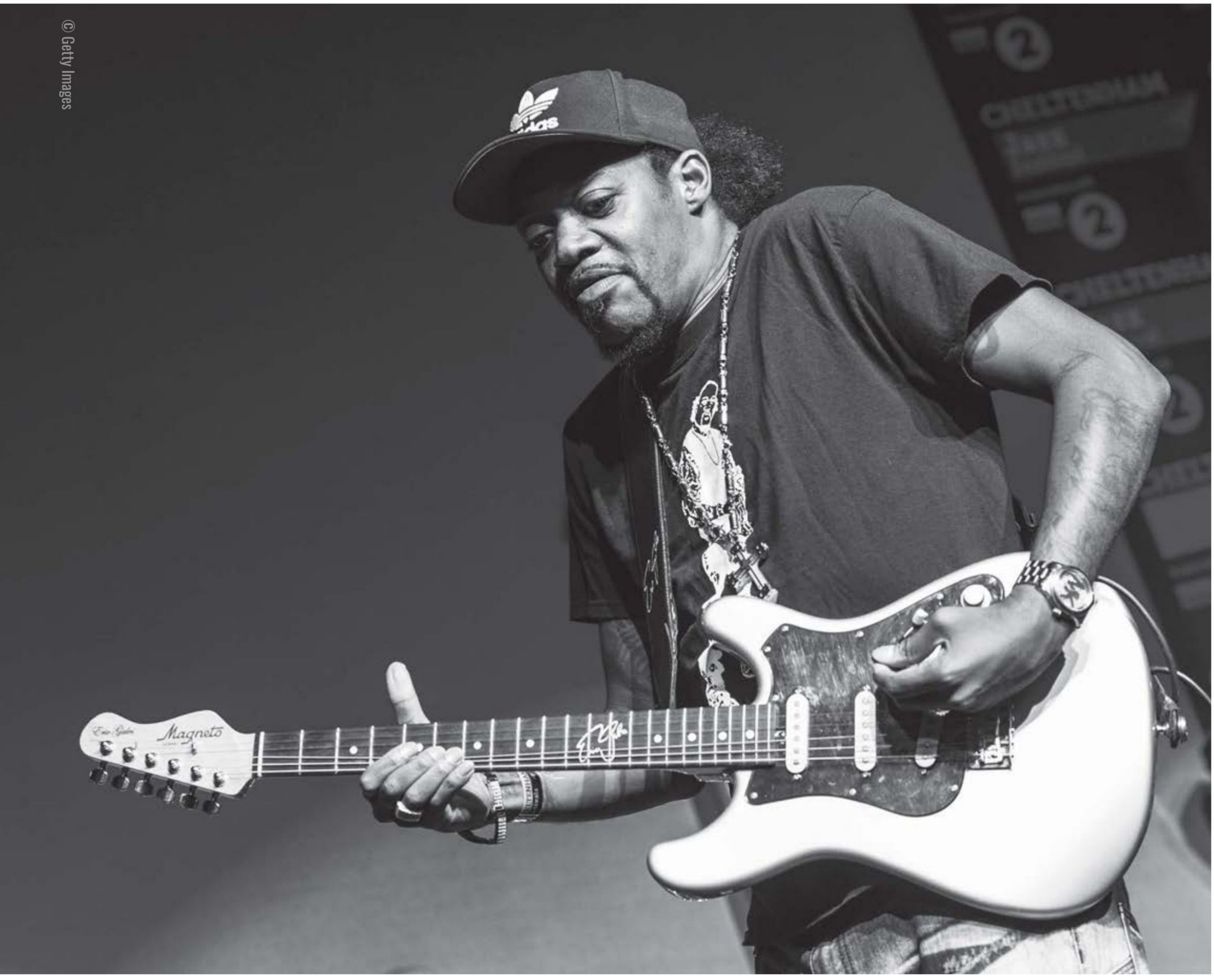


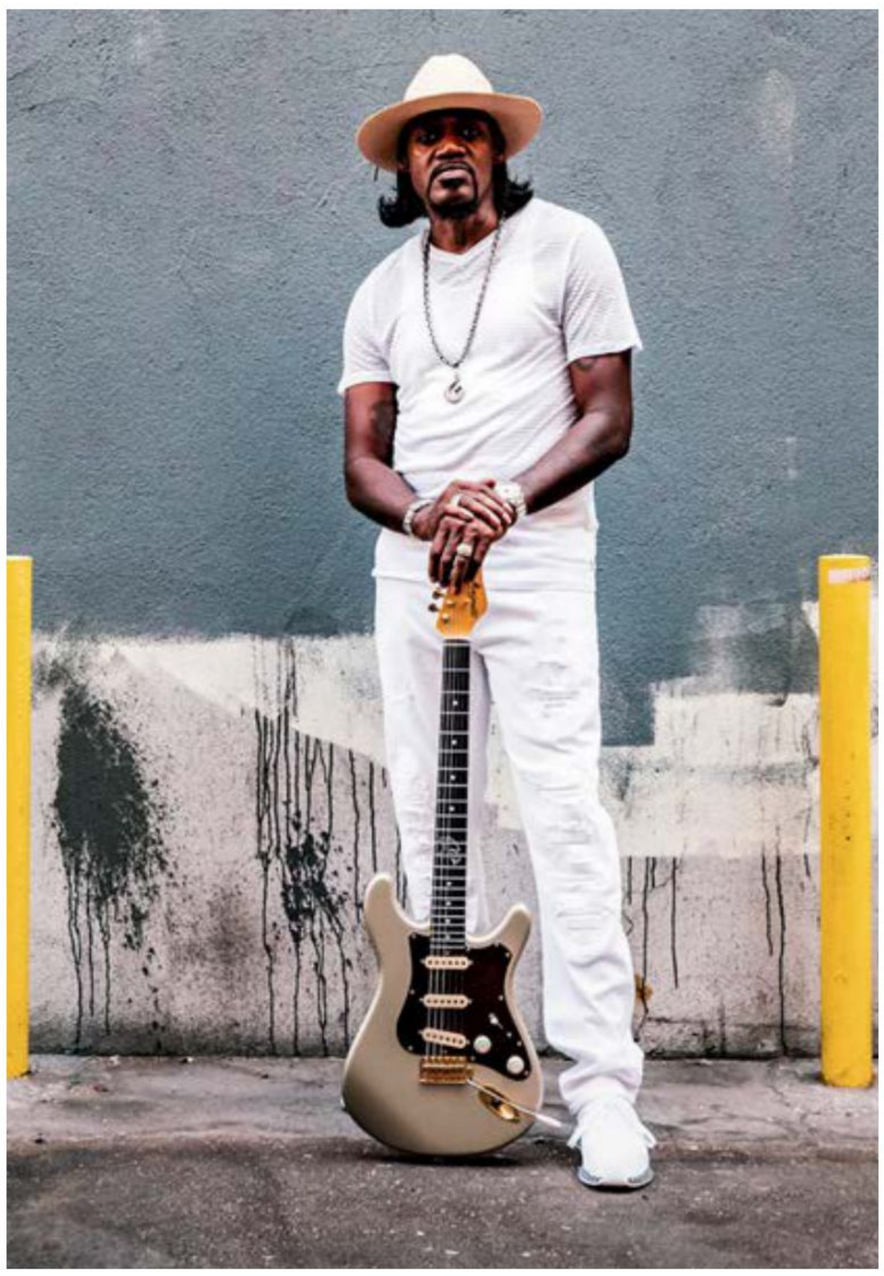
ABOVE Eric's Sonnet Raw Dawg II signature model was custom-made for him by Magneto, based in Raedersheim, France

BEST FOOT FORWARD

It's been nearly a decade since Gales was sent to prison for 18 months for violating his parole for an earlier drug conviction: he's come to appreciate the success and revival he's experienced since even more. "I do, I really do man, it goes without saying," he affirms. "You can tell in my playing and the energy that I put forth on stage every night. I'm just trying to put one foot in front of another and make today a little bit better than yesterday, and it seems to be working for me. If I'm leaving a legacy, I want people to know that this guy liked touching on everything that inspires him. I'm a wide-open person when it comes to music, and I just wanted to start that process of showing the world I'm not just stuck in one style.

"Blues, roots, rock and gospel is what I am, but there are aspects of other music that I like to touch on and I feel like I'm pretty competent at showing that now, and it's all right there for you to hear on the record. I just tried to give it all, man. I said that I'm going to go all out and really give the world where my head is right now, and hope that they accept it." **G**

Eric Gales' new album, *The Bookends*, is released 8 February on Mascot/Provogue



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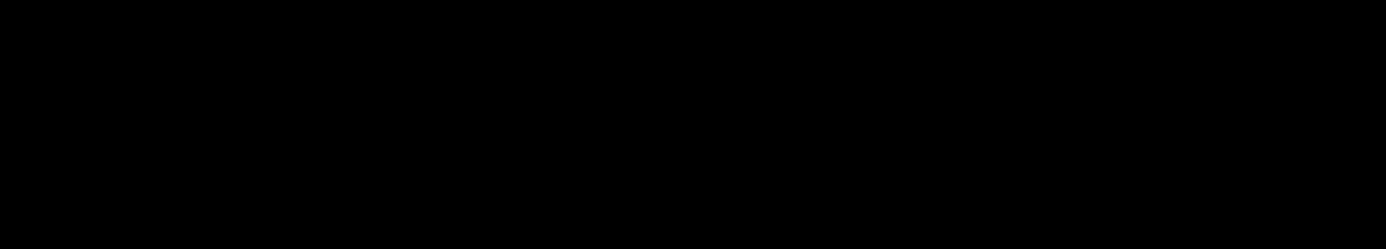

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CARDINAL VIRTUES

Bassist Catherine Popper has provided the four-string bedrock to some of the coolest names in music, including Jack White, Norah Jones, Willie Nelson and, as a member of The Cardinals, with Ryan Adams. She discusses her discovery of the bass, her memories of playing with Adams and the magic of vintage Precisions…

WORDS RICHARD PURDEN

We meet in the warm and comfy surroundings of New York City's Flux Studios, where Charlotte native Catherine Popper is busy recording with hardcore-punk pioneer Jesse Malin for his next solo record. On the other side of the studio glass, Lucinda Williams is sat in the producer's chair – the multiple-Grammy-winning Americana veteran is one of a laundry list of A-list stars that Popper has worked with in her career, including Jack White, Willie Nelson, Norah Jones and, perhaps most famously, as a key creative component of Ryan Adams & The Cardinals for the classic *Cold Roses* album and beyond.

"She's just a doll," says Popper of her producer for the day. "Jesse invites all of our opinion, he does about 10 takes of a track. With Ryan, we had never heard the song and would be recording it trying to figure out what was coming next… like a G chord, or whatever. It's cool that he trusts me – I'm a little sloppy, I'm not the player you call if you want precision. It's going to be different each time."

FINDING YOUR FEET

Popper's relationship with the bass guitar came in a roundabout way – she started out playing piano and violin before she discovered her calling, thanks to a brush with the law… "I was a really big Police fan and saw Sting," she recalls. "After that, I was in an orchestra playing bass, for some reason they let me. I was a weird fucking kid!"

It was clearly the right decision. Popper's knack for the four-string saw her earn a place at the Manhattan School Of Music, and she stayed in the city after graduating, earning her keep playing upright bass in the Big Apple's jazz clubs. It was while playing in and around New York that she would first cross paths with Jesse Malin. The former D Generation frontman had released his debut solo record, *The Fine Art Of Self Destruction*, in 2002 and it had a huge impact on the wider New York scene at the time. Little did Catherine know, however, that the pair would soon strike up an enduring, fruitful creative relationship…

"We were on the periphery," says Popper, laughing when we ask if the two moved in similar circles at the time. "We had spent time together but never really talked much, although we had danced around different people like Joseph Arthur. *The Fine Art Of Self Destruction* is one of my favourite records, so when he asked me to play with him, I was super-stoked. This is easily one of my favourite bands that I've toured with.

"I really like Jesse's work ethic and enjoy listening to him do business on the phone, he's so 'New York' and he reminds me of a New York that I kind of miss, the personalities. He makes it fun, eats healthy and there's not a lot of drugs around. Everything just fits really well, I'm friends with everybody."

Malin's debut was also Ryan Adams' first go-around as a record producer, and it didn't take long for Popper to move into the *Heartbreaker* singer's orbit. Then, in 2004, Adams fell off stage and broke his arm, forcing the workaholic guitarist to take some time out and think about what he was going to do next. The result was initially a collaboration between Adams and singer-songwriter JP Bowersock, but their next call

© Getty Images

was Popper, and with the addition of drummer Brad Pemberton and steel guitarist Cindy Cashdollar, Ryan Adams & The Cardinals was born. "I loved being in that band with Catherine Popper – she was amazing," Adams later reflected. "She was my good friend and I love her playing. The band were balanced because of Cat. I could never have made *Cold Roses*, one of my favourite records, without Catherine."

That Cardinals debut still stands out as one of Adams' most enduring and beloved of his superhumanly prolific career to date, and Popper looks back on her time in the band fondly. "It's special to me for certain reasons," she explains. "I'm often amazed that it translates for people, I'll be on tour and a stage hand will come up to me shaking and talk about that record. People have an affinity with *Cold Roses*; I'm surprised how much it affected people. For me, I'll think about what happened on a certain day, there's a lot of subtext. It was a very dynamic time for all of us in that band, there was a lot that was messy which I think made it very exciting. I think in any band, you write these songs that people love and it can feel like you're chasing the dragon when you play them again. It was a wild experience and I'm still tired from those days. It was stuff you can only do when you're young and I wasn't even that young at the time, I was in my early 30s."

NIGHT SHIFT

The Cardinals set a different tone for Adams, and the era, with outlaw-country bar rockers, road songs and Neil Young flavoured wild-prairie laments – all wrapped up in abundant guitar arrangements recorded through the night. "We'd be recording until noon the next day," says Popper, "and there was a lot of screaming and arguing with Black Sabbath playing in the background, and things like smoking on the tour bus, so you'd be breathing in this recycled air all the time… but we were all so into it, the record is a snapshot of that time."

Adams has suggested that *Cold Roses* emerged from a conviction to "keep his job" and not make zeitgeist-y records, but ones that would keep selling long after their release. It's not a stretch to say that the double-album was his attempt to record an *Exile On Main St.*-style long listen. "It's literally like a Stones record where everybody remembers and *everyone* was there!" Popper chuckles. "I walked in one night and there were people from other bands just sleeping on the studio floor. I was like: 'What are you doing here… and why the fuck would you want to be here!?' When we were recording *Cherry Lane*, Ryan wanted to take the microphone out into the street and record in the traffic or something… but then we needed the sound of glass smashing in the bathroom… but then who's gonna clean up the glass? It was hard a lot of times, but he's also one of the funniest people I've ever met."

Adams followed up *Cold Roses* with the second of his three long-players released in 2005. *Jacksonville*

City Nights, which featured Popper, head in hands, on the cover. It was Adams at his most confessional and plaintive – a country record delivered without a hint of irony.

"The way the record was recorded was even more important than the songs," says Popper. "Ryan would come raging in, like: 'Let's go, hit record,' and Tom Schick, the producer, would be like: 'But none of the microphones are on…' but we're hitting record anyway, because we had to capture the duet [*Dear John*] with Norah Jones!

"He sat down at the piano with her and it was so amazing to watch. It's funny, because I know Norah well [the pair perform together in alt-country band Puss N Boots] and she doesn't record that way! I was so proud of her, because I could tell she was uncomfortable not quite knowing the song, but it really works and it's so dynamic. You can hear feet slipping off the pedals because one of the mics isn't on and you're hearing it on the room mic, that's one of my favourite things about that record.

"I remember recording *When The Rope Gets Tight*, which later became *Don't Fail Me Now*, Ryan was so drunk I was leaning in to sing, play bass and then drop down a beat. It made a lot of sense and that worked, following him and singing at the same time, I didn't know the song and was trying to catch those downbeats and the vibrato. It was so late and we were fucked up and high."

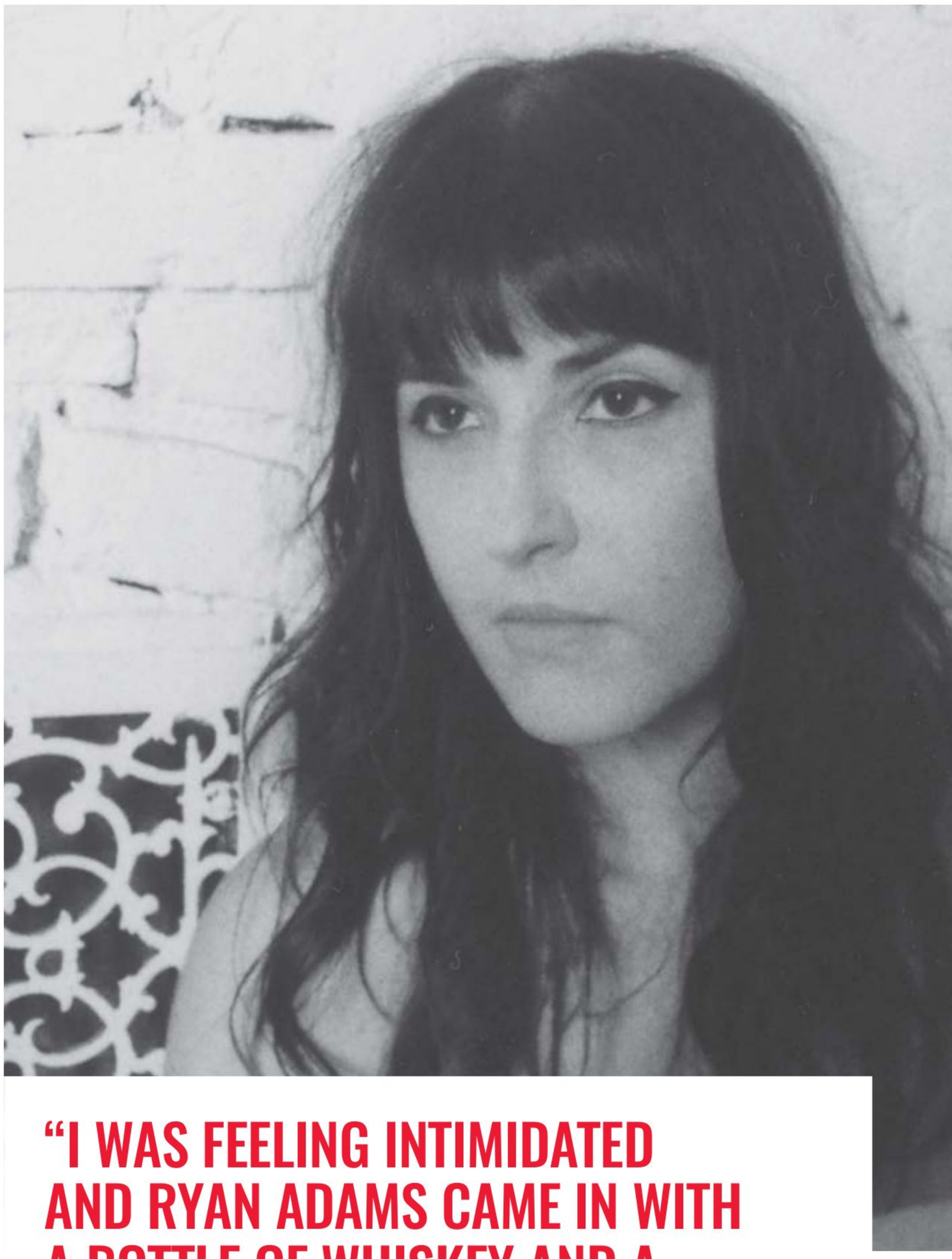
NC STATE OF MIND

Throughout their time together, Popper and Adams – both originally hailing from North Carolina – shared a beautifully dishevelled partnership, which brought the instinctive energy of the studio to The Cardinals' live sound.

"We sang well together," Popper reflects on their collaboration. "The first time I sang live, I really didn't want to do it. I'm not shy with a bass in my hand, but the microphone thing was new for me. I was feeling intimidated and Ryan came in with a bottle of whiskey and a butcher's knife and said: 'Look at these while you sing.' I remember listening back to *Why Do They Leave?* at the Ryman and was like: 'Holy shit, we sound great, like we're mad at each other.'"

Popper remained with The Cardinals during the recording sessions that spawned *III/IV* – an album that was rejected by his label at the time and eventually appeared in 2010 – and his Cardinals-backed 2007 solo record *Easy Tiger*. The sessions for the latter, however, saw a change in approach to more orthodox recording techniques, as well as a significant overhaul of personnel – including Popper's departure.

"It's a lot less interesting than people think it is; it was just time," Popper insists of her reasons for leaving the project behind. "He switched producers and Jamie [Candiloro] came in to record at Electric Lady. I'm on a couple of tracks, I'll hear them some place and be like: 'That's me'."



"I WAS FEELING INTIMIDATED AND RYAN ADAMS CAME IN WITH A BOTTLE OF WHISKEY AND A BUTCHER'S KNIFE AND SAID: 'LOOK AT THESE WHILE YOU SING'"

Popper's stint in The Cardinals was obviously a creative and memorable one, but as if to confirm that she's closed the book on her time in the band, she's recently parted ways with a vital piece of equipment from her Cardinals era – and she doesn't, in truth, sound overly sentimental about letting go of it.

"I just sold the Guild Starfire that I played on all the Ryan records," Popper explains. "I need $3,000 more than I need a bass that I don't play anymore and I'm always disappointed with the sound. I have a '66 Fender Precision, which is fucking awesome to play. People say to me: 'I can't believe you travel with that', and I'm like: 'I don't want to play music if I'm not on that bass'.

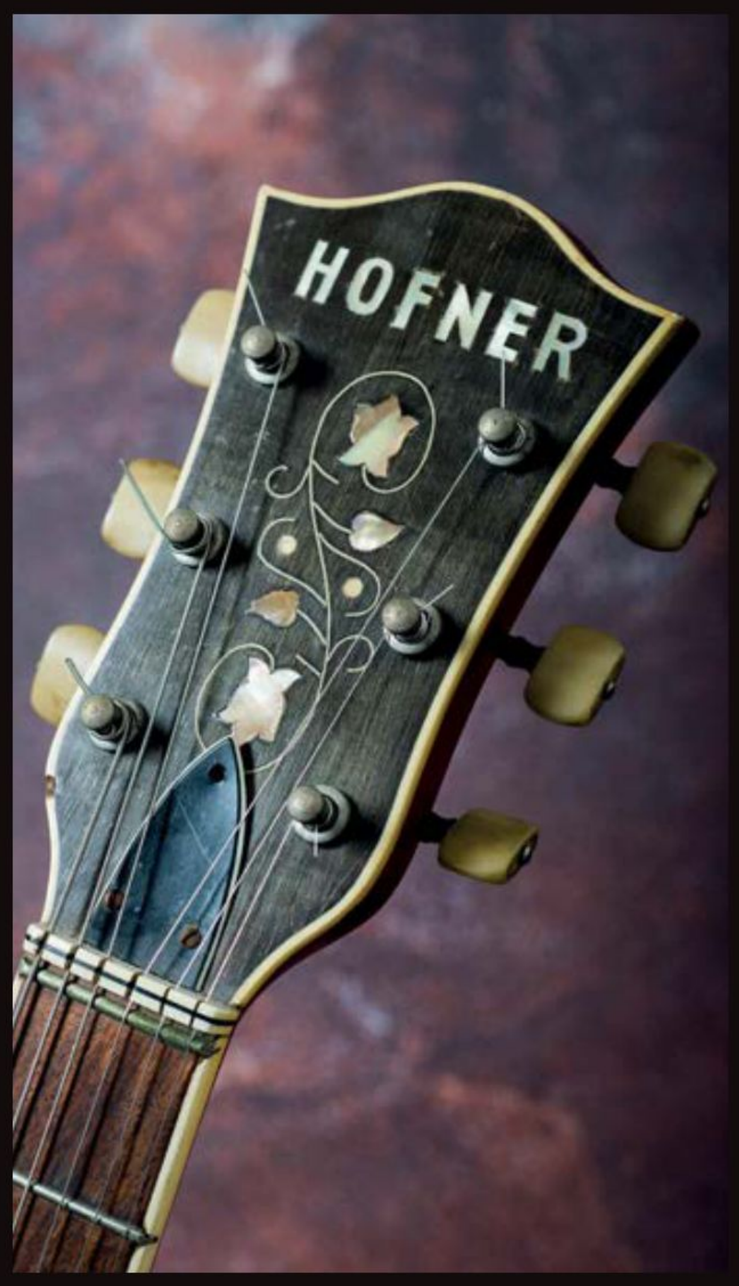
"Eventually, I'd like a nice little Mustang or Tele Bass," Popper says. "I use flatwound strings to brighten the sound on the P-Bass with Ashdown amps, they give it a nice woody tone so it doesn't end up sounding like a tampon commercial!" **G**

OPPOSITE PAGE Popper with her "fucking awesome" 1966 Fender Precision Bass

THE MONEY SHOT

1961 HÖFNER VERITHIN

Höfner
FOREIGN


HOFNER

Höfner

Although the vintage-guitar market appears to be flying at the moment, there are still great deals to be had. This 1961 Höfner Verithin is one such example – selling for £520 (plus fees) at the Gardiner Houlgate Guitar Auction in Corsham, Witshire in December 2018. In a modern context, these old Höfners can be a wild ride, but lower stage-volume levels these days can make hollowbodies with microphonic pickups easier to handle.

Like the proverbial London buses, red machines have arrived in numbers in the west of England of late, including a 1964 model with a Bigsby and a '64 Verithin bass going under the hammer on 13-14 March.

Visit guitar-auctions.co.uk to find out more and head to our YouTube channel (youtube.com/theguitarmagazine) to hear this Verithin in action alongside an equally cool and bargainous 1960s Harmony H75 that fetched £700 (plus fees) at the same December auction. Highlights of the March auction include bluesman Booker 'Bukka' White's 1933 National Duolian resonator. G

VINTAGE BENCH TEST

GIBSON GA-5 SKYLARK

WORDS HUW PRICE **PHOTOGRAPHY** ELEANOR JANE

The Gibson Skylark is an underrated small amp from the late 50s and early 60s that many vintage collectors are focusing on as a viable alternative to pricier Fender equivalents. Read on to discover that great things really do come in small packages…

Almost all guitarists love vintage Fender tweed amps – and as a result, they're not exactly cheap. Late-50s Bassmans and Twins reside in the 'forget about it' bracket for most ordinary players, but if a re-tweed isn't a deal breaker for you, some well-used models will cost you about the same as a boutique amp from a top builder, or sometimes even less. Granted, a couple of grand is still a considerable outlay, so some vintage amp fans are turning their attention to other brands.

We've long considered Gibson amps to be both underappreciated and undervalued, because they can give you the looks and the tone to rival many of their more celebrated tweed equivalents, but for a lot less money. On this side of the pond, the obstacles are that relatively few made it to the UK in the first place, and that you'll almost certainly need a step-down transformer.

There's a double whammy of further complications, too. The layouts often left the components vulnerable to heat damage, and the more complex models are also harder to repair and restore than the maintenance-minded designs of Leo Fender. The GA-5 Skylark model is a good bet, though. Since they have barely a handful of components, servicing these little

ABOVE The GA-5's rear-mounted control panel is sparse but stylish

INSTRUMENTS
VOLUME
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
50 OR 60 CYCLES

INSTRUMENTS
1
2
110-125 VOLTS

GIBSON AMPS CAN GIVE YOU THE LOOKS AND THE TONE TO RIVAL MANY OF THEIR MORE CELEBRATED TWEED EQUIVALENTS, BUT FOR A LOT LESS MONEY

guys isn't a problem and they don't generate much heat, either.

Because the serial numbers are less than reliable, pinpointing an exact manufacturing date for Gibson amps is never more than an educated guess. However, we do have a rough timeline, because pre-1958 GA-5s had a 'TV' front and a 6SJ7 pentode for V1. The pentode was superseded around 1957 with a 'narrow panel' cabinet redesign and in 1958, a 12AX7 started to be used in position one. Post-1963 models acquired a pair of 6AQ7 power valves, delivering 10 watts of output.

This is an example of the second version of the GA-5 and the date code on the Centralab volume pot indicates the fifth week of 1960. Although we can't say for sure, this amp was certainly made before 1963 but most likely some time during 1960.

COULD'VE BEEN A CONTENDER

In the vintage market, GA-5s are often cited as an affordable alternative to the tweed Fender Champ. This is based on the physical size, 4-watt power, 8-inch speaker and an identical valve complement, but it's not necessarily a valid comparison. The earlier 5C1 Champ and the first version of the GA-5 were certainly all-but-identical electronically. However, if you compare the later 5F1 Champ with this version of the GA-5, the circuits are noticeably different. The 5Y3 rectifier is the same but the GA-5 has a slightly beefed-up power supply with higher-value filter capacitors. From this, we might expect less compressed dynamics and maybe firmer lows.

The inputs are different too, because the GA-5's grid resistors are 47K rather than 68K and unlike the Champ, there's no 1M resistor to ground. Both amps have a negative feedback loop connected to the cathode of the phase-splitter side of the 12AX7, but with a 47K resistor in the loop rather than 22K, the GA-5's negative feedback is slightly reduced.

All the signal-cap values are identical at 0.022uF, and the GA-5 is loaded with a bumblebee and two Sprague black beauties. It's a wonder they haven't already been pillaged by rapacious Les Paul enthusiasts, because they're exactly the same as the tone capacitors used in many vintage Gibson guitars.

TOP LEFT With just a volume control to play with, you'll probably figure the Skylark out without needing to read a manual

BOTTOM LEFT The instrument inputs are joined internally with mixer resistors, so you and a friend can enjoy two watts each

ABOVE The logo looks a lot like those that Gibson fitted to 1950s Flying Vs

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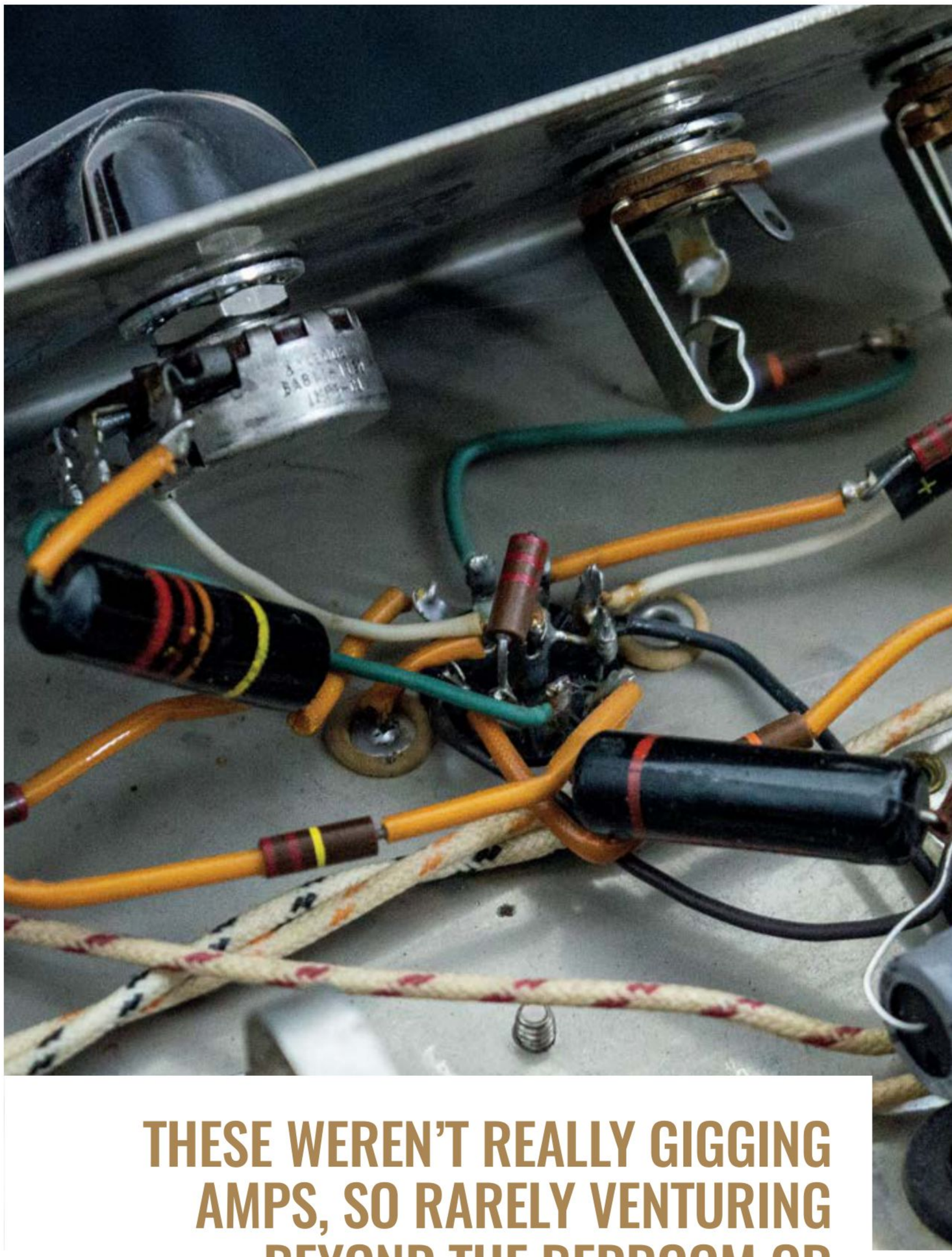

THESE WEREN'T REALLY GIGGING AMPS, SO RARELY VENTURING BEYOND THE BEDROOM OR SUBURBAN GARAGE HAS ENSURED THAT PLENTY HAVE SURVIVED

Additionally, both the 12AX7's plate resistors are 220K rather than 100K, and the first stage has a 20uF cathode bypass capacitor. This capacitor should provide a full frequency boost, so we're expecting a fair bit of overdrive when we fire this one up.

Clearly, these weren't really gigging amps, so rarely venturing beyond the bedroom or suburban garage has ensured that plenty of GA-5s, Champs and so forth have survived in good condition. This one is in great shape and still has its original tan leather handle with brass fixings. The power light is missing a jewel, but a modern replacement would be cheap, easy to source and would appear identical.

Unlike a 5F1 Champ, the GA-5 features true point-to-point wiring – and it was very nicely done. The original 3-in-1 filter capacitor has been replaced with modern electrolytics. The work has been performed to a professional standard, but the original capacitor is included with the amplifier. Incidentally, we

OPPOSITE Having the original Jensen is cool, but the Skylark would probably sound even better through a larger extension speaker

ABOVE All the wiring is point-to-point and it's a wonder that those caps haven't been pillaged by vintage Les Paul enthusiasts

ABOVE The Gibson Skylark is a big amp in a small package and one of the best vintage 'student' amps we've played

tested it and all three stages are indeed toast. Maybe a future owner could find a tech crazy enough to restuff the cardboard tube and restore the original look – although this woudn't make the amp sound any different. While they're at it, they could replace the original mains wiring with modern wire in order to ground the amp properly. This amp's originality is charming, but safety is more important.

KEY FEATURES

GIBSON GA-5 SKYLARK
DESCRIPTION Single-channel, cathode-biased, single-ended combo amplifier. Made in the USA
POWER RATING 4W
VALVES 12AX7, 6V6, 5Y3
CONTROL PANEL 2x input jacks, volume control, power switch
SPEAKER 1x Jensen P8 Special Design
DIMENSIONS 340 x 338 x 180mm
WEIGHT 5.8kg/12.9lb
CONTACT ATB Guitars
atbguitars.com

IN USE

The GA-5 is a far crunchier, sweeter and wilder ride than any Blackface or Silverface Champ and it has a bigger voice than a comparable tweed. The overdrive comes on very quickly, but it's creamy, harmonically loaded and surprisingly devoid of small-amp boxiness and single-ended harshness. The bass stays remarkably composed, even when the amp is being pushed and far from being overly compressed, the dynamic response is lively and touch-sensitive. Like all the Gibson amps we've tried, the treble hovers on the edge of darkness, but the GA-5 does become brighter as the volume control is turned up.

One effective way to use this amp is to turn it up until you're getting sufficient brightness, and then turn down the volume control on your guitar. If you have good P-90s or PAF replicas wired 50s style, or a treble-bleed capacitor on your volume control, then the brightness is maintained, the GA-5 cleans up really well and you can explore a wide range of clean and overdriven tones.

This GA-5 is comfortably one of the most enjoyable and best-sounding small amps we have ever tried, and it's easy to see why its 'big amp in miniature' tonality makes the model so highly regarded for studio work. You can certainly get a righteously honking grind at levels that wouldn't trouble even the most delicate ribbon microphone. And then, once you're over the initial excitement, try turning down to experience that dark Gibson sparkle on the edge of breakup at acoustic-guitar volume levels. ***G***

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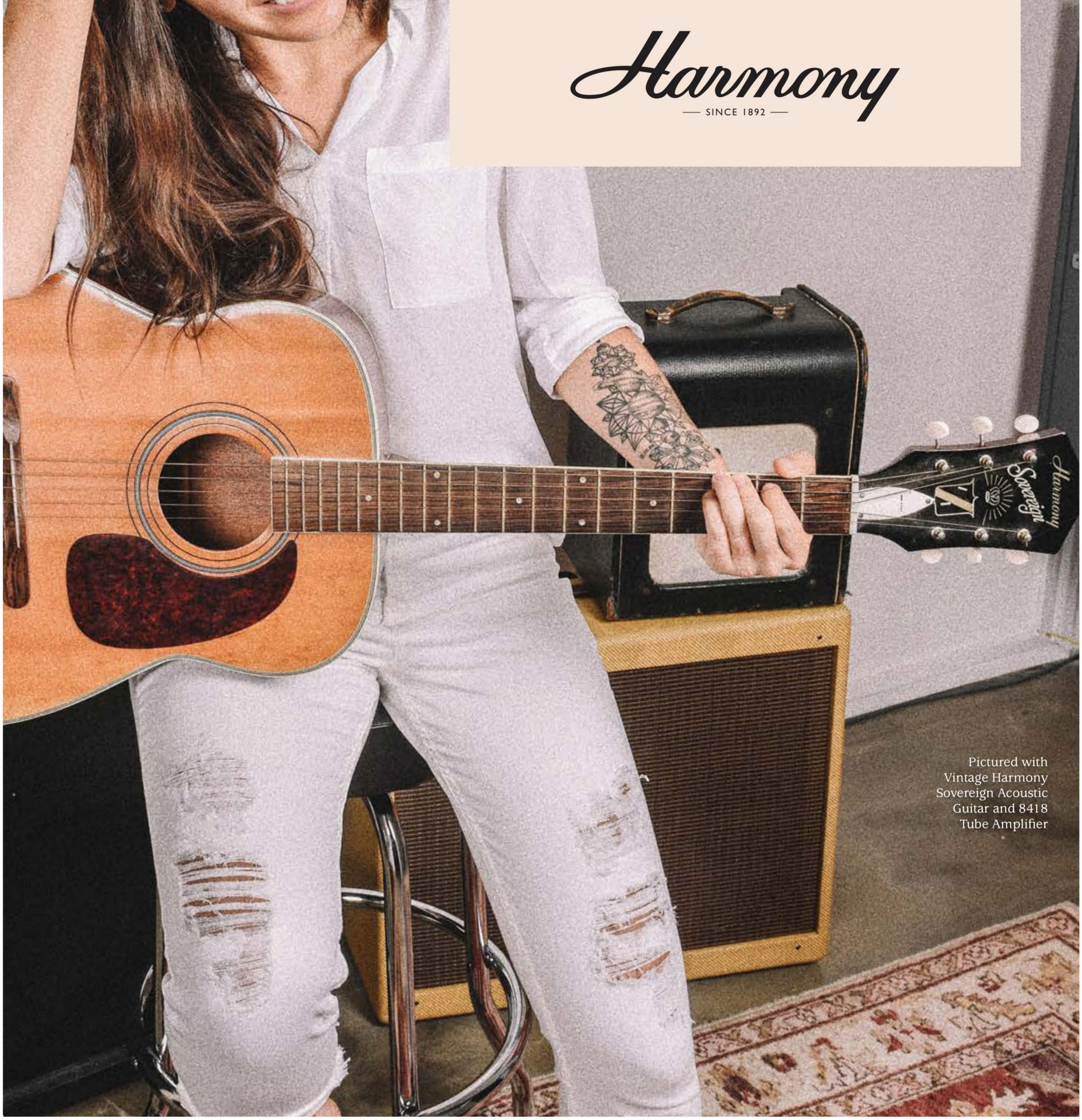

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THE COLLECTION

LOCAL HERO

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY MARK ALEXANDER

Working musician Willie Logan has seen a lot in a career spanning four decades and taking in 4,500 gigs. We check out his guitar collection and find out about the instruments he's loved, lost and modified along the way…

When we meet at the tail end of 2018, Fife-based guitarist Willie Logan has gigs lined up on Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights, and another on Christmas Day. "I have to," he says. "It's what I do for a living." We catch up with Willie in one of his local haunts – a social club a few miles outside of Dunfermline. As though to prove he's a fixture on the local scene, as we discuss Willie's guitar collection, a cleaner wanders into the large, open room keen to discuss his previous performances, debating the merits of live music and his rapport with the locals.

Willie started gigging when he was 15, taking the stage at his high-school dance armed with three songs, a catalogue guitar, an Orange amp and a 4x12 speaker cabinet. He may have been loud, but he was far from polished. "I didn't have a clue what I was doing," he laughs. His debut performance may have been rough and ready – he inexplicably turned up to the gig with a bass guitar he had built for his bandmate out of a wardrobe door – but it sowed a seed that would see him playing an average of two gigs a week for the next four decades; taking a bow on nearly 4,500 occasions. Willie has also racked up 16 album releases and amassed a guitar collection which, at its peak, numbered 50 instruments.

His is a career of highs and lows, punctuated by his fascination with guitars. "I've got to that stage in my life when I've got all the guitars I need," says the 57-year-old. "I know people say 'there's always room for one more', but I haven't got any room left!"

Originally from Edinburgh, but now living in Fife, Willie's first guitar was a £10 sunburst Kansas acoustic ordered from a catalogue. It bore the brunt of his restless creativity, as he planed the neck to make it feel more like a Fender. His tinkering "completely destroyed" the guitar, which he still owns today – although admittedly, it's in bits. This tendency to tweak has accompanied him throughout his career,

with most of his guitars bearing some signs of his tendency to modify.

Earnest in his pursuit of tone, Willie now goes about his business in his small but perfectly formed studio. Neatly tucked away in a converted attic, the studio bares all the hallmarks of his obsessive nature, and is where he feels most content. "I love writing, recording and being creative," he says. "Gigging is what makes the most money but it can be the opposite of being creative, especially if you're being paid to play in pubs and clubs."

STUDIO LINE

His custom-built studio is also home to an impressive guitar collection that mainly resides out of sight behind a drawn curtain. A few instruments remain within easy reach, propped up in the room's guitar rack. They include a 1991 Gibson Les Paul Standard in a deep Wine Red; Willie's first Lester, which was bought second-hand using money borrowed from his parents. "I've just rediscovered it and use it for clean tones, especially on the bridge pickup," he explains.

Another is an Ibanez JEM Floral Pattern, acquired because he liked the look of the elaborate design, but which is rarely played. By contrast, his unassuming 1989 Ibanez RG has served its time well, and gives us our first proper taste of Willie's fervent approach to guitar customisation. "I used this guitar constantly and then retired it, and have only recently started playing it again," he explains. "It has a very thin neck. I replaced the original because I wanted a shark-tooth-bound neck," he explains. "The normal Ibanez wiring means the humbuckers automatically coil tap, with the middle pickup staying hum-cancelling. But you don't get single coils, so I had the guitar wired in such a way that when you flick the switch, you get the single coils. You get extra sounds from the middle pickup. It's very subtle, but you get different levels of attack on certain strings."

Hanging on the wall in the studio is a Fender Precision Bass which, Willie proudly informs me, was owned by the glam-rock band Hello back in the 1970s. It appears to be untouched, until you spot the treble pickup. "I was working in a studio in the 80s with some of the ex-members of Hello. I decided I needed a new bass and bought it from the studio," Willie recalls. "But I simply couldn't leave things alone, so I got Chris Cross, who used to work with Patrick Eggle, to rout out a bridge pickup and by doing so, probably wrecked the value of the guitar, but that's what gives me my bass sound in the studio. It's so distinctive. It's great."

The guitars played an important part in Willie's latest release *Too Many Hats*, where he pays homage to some of his musical heroes, such as Focus, XTC, Bowie and Queen. Away from the studio and on the stage, Willie mostly relies on his incredibly versatile standard Fret-King Corona.

WILLIE RECENTLY REDISCOVERED HIS 1991 GIBSON LES PAUL STANDARD AND USES IT FOR CLEAN TONES, ESPECIALLY ON THE BRIDGE PICKUP

"I use it all the time when I'm playing in my function band Sphere," he says. "We're just guitar, bass and drums with a female vocalist, so I need to play guitar synth as well these days. I fitted the Fret-King with a GK-3 pickup and that has become my main guitar. It makes all of my other guitars kind of redundant when I'm playing with the band. It's a small sacrifice; it makes life really interesting, because I have to think about what I'm playing."

As well as adding synth capabilities, Willie made a few minor adjustments to the Fret-King's pups. "I changed the bridge pickup to a mini humbucker, because I wasn't convinced about the full-coil setting on the original P-90. However, the tap setting of the P-90 was stunning. When I can be bothered, I'm going to put it back, because the original Wilkinson pickup was phenomenal." He neatly pairs the Fret-King with his LAG Masterbuilt Jet 1000 with DiMarzio pickups and a Wilkinson bridge. "The clever thing about this

PREVIOUS PAGE Willie's heavily modified Metallic Purple Ibanez RG from 1989...

FACING PAGE ...and the same company's flamboyant JEM Floral Pattern model

ABOVE Willie's first Les Paul, a Wine Red 1991 Standard

“THE WIRING HAS BEEN CHANGED; PUSHING THE BOTTOM TONE CONTROL TURNS ON A COIL THAT’S WIRED IN SERIES WITH THE NECK PICKUP FOR A THICKER SOUND”

ABOVE Two different eras of Gibson: a 1977 RD Standard next to a gorgeous 1963 sunburst ES-330

FACING PAGE A Fender 1997 California Series Stratocaster, rewired for extra versatility

guitar is its locking machine heads,” he says. “When you pull the strings through and start tightening them up, the head cuts the end of the string.”

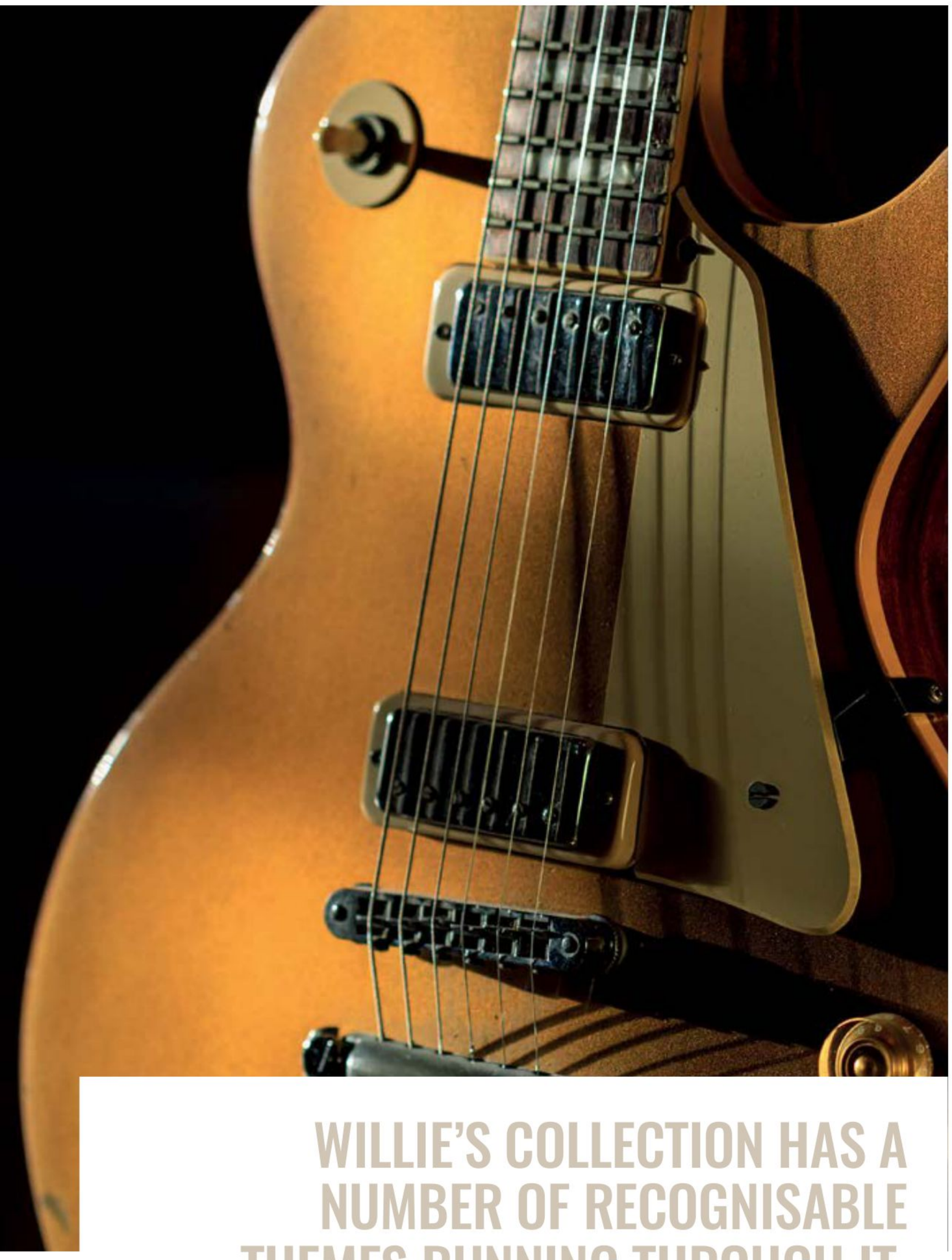
DOUBLE TROUBLE

Willie brings out a handsome pair of Fenders, both with rosewood fingerboards, beefed-up bridge pickups and tortoiseshell scratchplates. “The Sunburst is a California Series Strat from 1997,” he explains. “The wiring has been changed, so that if you push the bottom tone control it turns on a coil that is wired in series with the neck pickup, to give it humbucking properties and a thicker sound. I toured Germany with that guitar. I bought it new and love it. I also have a black 1980s Japanese ’62 reissue that I’ve messed about with. It has the same wiring.”

To get a sense of Willie’s ruthless tinkering, you can add a Kent Armstrong bridge pickup to the Sunburst and a Fat Strat neck pickup, Ibanez S1 and an Artec bridge pickup to the black Strat. Like many of us, Willie is clearly a guitarist with an elusive sound running around his head that’s tantalisingly close and yet forever out of reach.

Willie’s next offering crosses the tracks into the tonal world of Gibson, and in particular the ES-330. The thinline hollowbody is associated with both the fat, warm tones of blues and jazz and the jangle of the mid-1960s British Invasion. This 1963 model has all of the above, and somehow escaped Willie’s probing soldering iron – as did all his Gibsons. “When I got it, the bridge was a sawn-off Bigsby, which was incomplete,” he recalls. “I managed to pick up a replacement tailpiece which I tried to buff up to make it look old. That’s the only thing on the guitar that’s not original.”

His Les Paul Deluxe Goldtop is a throwback to the era of flares, glam rock and platform soles and its pair of mini-humbuckers deliver a brighter tone than his Wine Red 1991 Standard. For Willie, this 1979 guitar is an important addition to his collection, albeit a hefty one. “It’s a guitar I’ve always wanted. When this one came up, I swapped it for some cash and a Tokai,” he says. “The guitar weighs a tonne. It is really heavy, but I’ve used it on many recordings, in particular my



WILLIE'S COLLECTION HAS A NUMBER OF RECOGNISABLE THEMES RUNNING THROUGH IT. MODIFICATION IS ONE; ANOTHER IS HIS LOVE OF IBANEZ GUITARS

ABOVE A heavy 1979 Les Paul Deluxe Goldtop that's seen plenty of studio action

ABOVE RIGHT Willie's Fret-King Corona is his main stage guitar

FACING PAGE More Ibanez models – a 1980s Studio Twin doubleneck and an Artist

House Of The Rising Sun album, on *Watching From Behind*. It's all-original apart from the scratchplate, which I added."

Also residing in Willie's collection is his 1977 Gibson RD Standard, one of the company's more leftfield late-70s designs. "I swapped it for a Les Paul Custom, which was probably a very bad deal, but I got the guitar I wanted," he says. "It's all-original except for the frets, which I had to replace because they were almost flush with the neck."

Willie's collection has a number of recognisable themes running through it. His preference for modification is one; another is his love of Ibanez guitars. This extends from his road-worn RG and pristine floral JEM to the company's older offerings, beautifully encapsulated in the glorious 1979 AR300 with its Super 80 pickups and their 'flying fingers' etching. "I don't use it anymore," he explains, "but I keep it, because it looks stunning."

Equally beguiling is his Studio Twin from the 80s. "It's a budget twin-neck," says Willie, "but I've kept it for all these years, because I've had 12-string Rickenbackers, Danelectros and Yamahas, and nothing records like that 12-string neck. It just chimes like a bell. It's got Super 70 pickups and even the six-string neck sounds vintage. Even though it's cheap, it sounds great." And wouldn't you know, the Twin has an extra coil-split switch below the 12-string neck pickup.

FALLING OVATION

Another pattern that emerges from Willie's guitar collection is his fascination for an era of unashamed flamboyance. The 1970s may have been a decade of questionable taste, but it was also a period of unexpected innovation, best illustrated by the Ovation Deacon that was launched in 1972/'73. With a two-octave, 24-fret mahogany neck, the Deacon was designed to be as comfortable to play sitting down as standing up. More importantly, it was rare. "They did them in sunburst, cherry and natural finishes," Willie recalls. "The only natural one I saw was a 12-string in London. Then, a couple of months later, I saw Noddy Holder playing one on *Top Of The Pops*. The only sunburst I saw was mine, but I had it refinished

Artist

"THE GUITAR WAS WRECKED WHEN I GOT IT. THE TONE CONTROL DIDN'T WORK PROPERLY AND THE PREAMP HAD BEEN DAMAGED – FORTUNATELY A FRIEND HAD A REPLACEMENT"

THIS PAGE Willie's refinished Ovation Deacon has been in the wars and is awaiting repairs

in cherry, because the guitar was wrecked when I got it. The tone control didn't work properly and the preamp had been damaged. Fortunately, a friend had a working replacement preamp, so I swapped them over and hung it on my wall above a ceramic elephant. One day, it fell off the wall and smashed the preamp and the elephant! The guitar now has the original preamp back in it and is a bit faulty. One day, I'll get round to repairing it properly."

The Ovation Deacon is paired with a more familiar early-80s Ovation Legend. "I've used this guitar on practically all of my recordings," says Willie. "It has a pronounced V-shaped neck, and it's absolutely stunning. Every single note rings, there's no buzzing. It's just perfect," says Willie, who was given the guitar on his 21st birthday. "Sadly, the guitar doesn't belong to me anymore – I gave it to my daughter for her 21st birthday… But I can borrow it whenever I need it!" *G*

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THE RUNDOWN

THE BEST MINI PEDALS

WORDS JOSH GARDNER

Mini pedals are a great way to get all the sounds you need with the smallest-possible footprint on stage. Here's our pick of the best bijou stompboxes that will help you maximise your pedalboard's real estate…

1 JHS MINI FOOT FUZZ V2

Mini pedals are often dismissed as the preserve of budget brands, but the Kansas City boutique darling JHS Pedals has a selection of mini-pedals in its range, and none is more fun than the Mini Foot Fuzz. Offering fuzz sounds ranging from gated, low-gain splat to singing, sustaining buzz, there's a load of versatility in those two little knobs, while the V2 version goes further still, with a toggle switch to offer a choice of vintage low-gain or modern high-gain fuzz tones.

2 TC ELECTRONIC HALL OF FAME MINI

The physical realities of size and power requirements mean that you're never going to get loads of versatility from DSP-hungry digital effects such as reverb, but the Hall Of Fame Mini offers an ingenious solution. While you only get one sound at once and one knob to tweak it with, TC's TonePrint technology lets you beam in a variety of different reverb sounds to the pedal, so you can choose your favourite, tweak it to taste, and then have it at your feet whenever you need it.

3 XOTIC EP BOOSTER

The FET preamp of the venerable Echoplex EP-3 has been used as an echo-free tone-enhancing salve by the likes of Brian May, Andy Summers, Jimmy Page and even Eddie Van Halen. The EP Booster takes that boost circuit's magic and crams it into a mini-pedal housing that delivers up to +20dB of boost, giving you shimmering highs, powerful lows and all the warmth and sparkle you could ever need. No wonder it's become a pro-pedalboard staple in recent years.

4 IBANEZ TUBE SCREAMER MINI

There are countless Tube Screamers and clones available today, but few deliver those classic TS overdrive tones in such a bite-sized package. Ibanez's mini version downsizes the classic overdrive circuit into a great-looking chassis – but the best part is, it sounds pretty damn close to the real thing. It's also ridiculously cheap for a bona-fide Tube Screamer, so whether you're using it as a boost or full-on overdrive, this is hard to beat.

5 DUNLOP FFM3 JIMI HENDRIX FUZZ FACE MINI

For years, if you wanted to get that authentic Hendrix fuzz tone at your feet, you had to compensate for the awkward reality of the classic Fuzz Face's plate-sized footprint – but no longer. The Fuzz Face Mini offers those classic dynamic fuzz tones of the 60s at low gain, but crank it up and grunge chaos is very much in play. The Mini version also adds such modern considerations as a status LED, external power and true bypass.

TC ELECTRONIC DITTO LOOPER

6 Loopers are often complicated beasts, but TC Electronic's pocket-sized unit has found its way onto scores of pedalboards because frankly, looping doesn't get much more intuitive than this. 24-bit uncompressed audio and unlimited overdubs mean you never have to stop playing along with yourself, while true bypass and analogue dry-through ensure it won't mess up your core tone.

ZVEX EFFECTS FUZZOLO

7 Zachary Vex has a reputation for his wildly creative effects, but the pint-sized Fuzzolo is borderline sensible… at least at first glance. A high-gain silicon fuzz that offers lashings of mid-bumped Muff-style box on the outset, the fun starts when you start tweaking the Fuzzolo's Pulse Width control. This changes the shape of the waveform, opening up a world of spitty, glitchy, 8-bit madness – we expect nothing less from Zvex.

KEELEY ELECTRONICS RED DIRT OVERDRIVE

8 Robert Keeley's modifications to the venerable Ibanez Tube Screamer have become legendary in their own right, and the Red Dirt pedal took all the tone-enhancing mods that Keeley had devised over a decade and put them into one pedal. The Red Dirt was a smash, but this mini version offers four switchable modes – distortion, overdrive, crunch and amp – selected by an internal DIP switch, so you can choose the perfect TS for you. **G**

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To be in with a chance of winning three sets of strings, simply head to the link below and answer the following question: guitar.com/news/competitions/lowdenstrings

What is the name of Lowden's first-ever production electric guitar?
A GL-1 **B** LG-1 **C** GL-10

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The closing date is **12.00am GMT, 1 March 2019**. The editor's decision is final. The competition is open to UK residents only. When entering *Guitar Magazine* competitions, you will be given the option to receive details of future promotions from BandLab UK Limited and related third parties. If you do not want to receive this information, you can opt out. This giveaway is open to over 18s only. For full terms and conditions, please go to bnd.la/gm-ctos.

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SHOP TALK

TERRY MCINTURFF

GUITAR MAKER

WORDS DAVE HUNTER

US builder Terry McInturff has been creating original and exquisitely crafted instruments for over 40 years, and counts the likes of Jimmy Page and Eric Clapton among his fanbase...

Anyone who plays a Terry C. McInturff guitar for the first time invariably has two reactions: "$@#* this thing is good!" and: "Why don't more people know about this guy?" If his name is less recognisable than some of those posting relatively big sales numbers among the boutique-guitar crowd, well, Page and Clapton certainly know it… and this North Carolina-based builder's reputation confirms he's a peerless craftsman.

In addition – and here's the truly admirable part – McInturff's creations are resolutely and consistently original, reflecting his own time-tested take on what makes a great electric guitar, rather than some effort to merely ape the form and functionality that has gone before. He got there through a combination of artistry and experience, and a probing of his training ground and background – and where he has taken his skills since – is akin to a trek through the heart of the small-shop guitar industry.

SWEET HOME CHICAGO

Rock 'n' roll radio has a lot to answer for, particular regarding its propensity for turning young minds toward the sordid pursuits of the electric guitar. Our hero is another who fell prey to its siren call in his youth, and never fully recovered. "I was raised in a Chicago suburb and fell in love with the sound of the electric guitar via that area's AM radio stations," McInturff tells us. "Upon moving to North Carolina and graduating high school, I wasn't sure what to do, until I read about a man in LA who built and repaired guitars for all the stars. Bells went off in my head! I enrolled in an early class of the Roberto-Venn School Of Luthiery [in Phoenix, Arizona] in 1977. My first day on the job was January 8, 1978 and I've been full-time working with guitars ever since."

Like many luthiers, McInturff brought in a paycheque in the early years by maintaining his own repair and restoration business, but start-to-finish building was always the objective – and he got a foothold in that effort pretty quickly, via some notable names in the business. In the early 90s, he was involved in a shop that subcontracted the manufacturing of highly regarded Ken Smith Basses. A few years later, when that shop was sold, he was hired by Hamer Guitars in Chicago as a custom

ABOVE A McInturff Carolina Standard model sporting a Goldtop finish

OPPOSITE Like so many luthiers, repair and restoration work was Terry McInturff's bread and butter during the early years

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builder, "although my duties expanded into a bit of product design, working with the artists, and so forth", McInturff adds. "I liked the job, but could not fathom remaining in the Chicago area where their original facility resided. I missed North Carolina, moved back, and opened my own building facility under my own name. That was in 1996."

BUILDING A BETTER TONE TRAP

Many budding luthiers build guitars largely because they just have the urge; the craft draws them in. For McInturff, however, while this was certainly true, it was essential that he brought something new to the table as well, and even the ever-admirable quest for 'quality' wasn't quite enough. As he puts it:

"I think that one vital question that a builder has to be able to answer is: 'Why should someone buy your guitar instead of someone else's?' Yes, I did want to bring extremely high build quality to market, but in addition, I wanted to bring the sounds I hear in my musical imagination to market as well. And I also wanted to bring my somewhat unique neck design. It sounds wooden and organic, is rock-stable, but doesn't sound overbuilt, if I do say so myself!"

McInturff's unique neck design was the end result of an effort to combat two problems long experienced by the necks of stringed instruments: instability over time, and the tendency to bow near the body joint, a place where the truss rod imparts no force to counter-balance string tension. Rather than over-reinforcing the neck (which, he says, greatly compromises its vital role as a "tone filter"), McInturff came up with a design-and-build regimen that defeats these two problems without sacrificing any of the tonal properties of the wood. "The result being that you can tour with the truss-rod cover on," he relates. "I should have patented it, but back in the early 80s, I was too young, foolish and broke to do so!"

Looks-wise, while each of the several models McInturff has put out over the years displays very much its own aesthetic, they're all easily 'relatable', too; which is to say, none requires the player to bend the imagination too far to accept the instrument as 'an electric guitar,' while still offering something entirely original in the design sense. Rather than being a conscious business decision, though, that's just an ethos McInturff has grown into as a player himself. "Simply put, I build guitars that I want to play, and hope that others do, too," he says. "I have a fair amount of live performance mileage under my belt, and experience as a recording engineer, too. Like many guitarists, I am rather conservative; I really admire those who really go for something radically new, but it's not my personal nature, I suppose. I look at guitars as being tools, primarily."

While the 'rather conservative' element within McInturff's nature might make sense of any casual observation of, for example, his elegant, reworked-Les-Paul-like Carolina Custom model, it falls away just a little when this impressive guitar's many painstaking details are observed up close. Peruse some of his more adventurous models, such as the the Spitfire and Spellcaster, and the understatement (some would argue) dives out the window entirely.

ABOVE Although none of McInturff's designs stretch the imagination too far at first glance, closer inspection reveals that the innovations are in the details

ACOUSTIC FEEDBACK

From McInturff's perspective, the electric guitar is not simply a platform for electronics: it's an acoustic instrument *fitted with* electronics. He acknowledges that pickups are very important, but insists the most they can do is to emphasise or de-emphasise aspects of what they are given, in the sonic sense; they cannot invent frequencies that are weak or absent in the acoustic signature. "This is why we see folks swapping pickups over and over in an attempt to make the guitar suitable," he says. "Most of the time, if no success is to be had, it's because the raw guitar cannot generate what is desired. It all begins with what the unplugged guitar sounds like."

Expounding upon that, and by way of finding some means of working within that limitation, McInturff says: "The acoustical properties of even a solidbody place true limits upon what will be available to amplify and I actually think of my guitars as being

“UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE THE ACOUSTIC SIGNATURE PLAYS HELPS EXPLAIN WHY SEEMINGLY IDENTICAL GUITARS CAN SOUND SO DIFFERENT FROM ONE ANOTHER”

ABOVE Terry McInturff describes himself as a “people person” who enjoys working closely with his clients to achieve their sonic aims

acoustical instruments first. This is how I build a predetermined sound, by building the appropriate acoustical signature into the instrument via the various design elements and wood selection… I have to find the right combinations of wooden elements that’ll produce the right acoustical signature.

“That dictates, among other things, how fast the string will reach full energy, its ‘twang’; how long the string will vibrate, its sustain; what shapes the string will assume as it vibrates, its overtone series and more. An understanding of the role the acoustic signature plays goes a long way towards explaining why seemingly identical guitars can sound so different from one another. It is a huge topic.”

In addition to the guitars he’s built for Jimmy Page and Eric Clapton, he’s also created instruments for Joe Bonamassa, David Hidalgo, Brad Whitford, Audley Freed and others. For the maker himself, though, this kind of star-player uptake has been invaluable for its constructive feedback. “Sometimes, someone will just say a sentence or two,” McInturff says, “make a suggestion, and I am on the way towards making an even better tool. But it’s never-ending; I’m a lifetime learner who knows it takes more than one career’s-worth of time to know everything about even a simple Telecaster down to the molecular level. There’s no such thing as knowing it all, just as there’s no such thing as ‘the best guitar in the world’.”

EQ ALTERNATIVES

At the other end of his acoustical approach to ensuring optimal tone, McInturff has pioneered alternative and upgraded electronics options, which he includes on many of his guitars. He still offers entirely traditional tone controls and that’s what many customers request for their own custom-builds, but as a player himself, he’s discovered the value of a more versatile and wider-ranging onboard EQ network – and he’s brought his experience with studio electronics to bear on the task, along with some inspiration from a bit of kit acquired from a legendary London recording studio. “One challenge,” he says, “is there’s not enough room in a guitar to build in high-quality active EQs, filters, and a proper power supply. And so a passive approach with no batteries is best. I’ve worked on this for many years and the final iteration of what I offer is the Maxi-Q. It features two filters: a low-pass filter and a midrange contour filter, all with true bypass. The low-pass filter is a clearer version of the trad tone control and was inspired by the filter on the Harrison 34C recording console.

“The midrange contour filter is really useful and fun; it’s inspired by the inductor-based EQ found in my Raindirk Series 3 recording-desk modules that came out of Olympic Studios in Barnes, in South West London. The Maxi-Q is fast and easy to use, and gives you a level of organic-sounding control that I haven’t seen on an electric guitar before. It can do a lot, and the goal was to make it sound natural.”

After expanding staff and production numbers early in his run with Terry McInturff Guitars up to a capacity of making and selling 10 guitars per week, Terry decided he just wasn’t having any fun managing a business. He promptly downsized to what is mostly a one-man operation, and that’s where he stands today. As such, the rewards of the creative process beginning to end and of interacting directly with the clients, are all his – and that’s exactly how he likes it.

“My favourite aspect is that of working with a client in order to build a sound,” McInturff concludes. “I’m a people person and so that relationship is very, very enjoyable. I’ve had many clients over the past 40 years, yet I cannot readily recall a single bad customer. I’m very blessed in that way! Strumming a newly completed guitar for the first time is always going to be a favourite moment, when I hear that I have indeed built the sound. I usually play it unplugged for a while before plugging it in… those are good times.” **G**

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Angelo Mazzocco (left) amd Terry Burton of Meris

INDUSTRY INSIDER

MERIS

INTERVIEW JOSH GARDNER

Founded by veterans of Line 6 and Strymon, Meris has rapidly become a respected name in high-end digital effects. We talk to founder Terry Burton and Angelo Mazzocco about how they got to where they are today…

How did you both first get into the guitar?
Terry: "When I was really young, I was so fortunate that one of my uncles, Dave, lived with us. He's a songwriter and guitar player, so I have early memories of wandering into his room and being awed by all of the recording gear.

"This was the early 80s, so there was an Ibanez LP copy, Portastudio, reel to reel, Yamaha SPX90 and pedals (including an A/DA Flanger!). He let me mess with all of this stuff, but I didn't actually start playing until my parents bought me my first guitar when I was 13 or so.

"After that, he let me borrow everything on a semi-permanent basis. That really sparked my gear obsession."
Angelo: "I loved woodworking as a little kid, and my father and I built a crude miniature guitar that we cut out on the bandsaw. Once my mom saw how much fun I was having, she bought me an acoustic guitar the next Christmas. That acoustic eventually led to a Stratocaster, and then it was all over… from then on, all I wanted to do is practise guitar."

When did you start tinkering with gear?
Terry: "A couple of years later, I discovered the Craig Anderton book (*Electronic Projects For Musicians*) and built my first distortion pedal. I blew it up at least three times before I ever got it to work, but after it did finally work, I was hooked.

"My dad was always really supportive of my interests and he loved music himself. I had a terrible-sounding solid-state Marshall that I also blew up by tinkering with and my dad encouraged me to ask the local music-gear repair person for a job. His name was Pat Buley and I begged him to let me help out with anything I could. After a week or so, he said yes – it was a dream come true and I was so grateful. I tore into every piece of gear he had waiting to be fixed, studied every schematic. That was really a fun time and an invaluable lesson on how to engineer music products."
Angelo: "As a teenager, I was fascinated with all of the amazing rack gear that was popular at the time. While most of it was priced out of my reach, I researched all I could to understand how the devices and their algorithms worked. When I started college, I focused on Digital Signal Processing with the aim of some day working in the music industry. Between classes, I was a research assistant for a professor studying the physics behind optical computing. This gave me access to an electronics lab and machine shop, where I would build pedals after hours. The first pedal I built in that shop was an overdrive pedal with selectable asymmetrical clipping curves."

How did you get into the business of making pedals?
Terry: "After working in repair for a few years, I applied for a job at Line 6, which was only about a 30-minute drive from where I lived in Ventura. I started out as a tech in the engineering department and after a short time, they gave me the opportunity to become a design engineer. I worked mostly on amplifiers. I'm so grateful for that gig, I had many mentors there.

"After about seven years, I got the itch to try my own thing, so I quit and my wife Jinna and I started Strymon in our tiny two-bedroom apartment. Fast forward to 2013 and I was ready to start something new again. I contacted an old friend and my favourite DSP engineer in the whole world, Angelo, who was also ready to try something new. Meris was born…

"I'd design the hardware, Angelo would design the algorithms and Jinna would be responsible for the look and vibe of the brand and products."
Angelo: "After I graduated, my wife and I flew out to California and drove up and down the coast interviewing at telecommunications firms; along the way, I stopped at both Digidesign and Line 6.

"I was lucky enough to catch Michel Doidic during some rare downtime and we bonded over Frank Zappa. Thankfully, I was offered a job as a DSP engineer and started soon after. And that is where I met Terry! I am so grateful to team up Terry, who is such an electronics wizard and Jinna, who has an incredible artistic vision."

How did you support the business in the early days?
Terry: "We've always been self-funded, which was extremely challenging. But the upside of that is that you have complete and total freedom on your designs. I think that if you can make it past the painful beginning, it's the only way to maintain creative freedom."

Read our review of the Meris Enzo multi-voice instrument synthesiser pedal at Guitar.com

“THE GENERAL THEME WITH OUR GEAR IS THAT WE ALWAYS WANT TO CREATE SOMETHING THAT ACTS AS AN INSTRUMENT IN AND OF ITSELF AND IS INSPIRED BY A CENTRAL IDEA OR CONCEPT”

At what point did you feel like you nailed your branding?

Terry: “Jinna came from some of the top design studios in LA and had already done design and/or branding work for GM, Disney, Dragonframe, Strymon and many others, so I was always confident that she’d nail it for Meris. She has a very clear vision of how to reflect all of our personalities genuinely through the brand and I think that shows in all of our work. She is a great artist and we are lucky and humbled to have her on the team.”

What’s your proudest moment as a pedal maker to date?

Terry: “Probably the release day of our first two pedals, the Mercury7 and the Ottobit Jr. We were a fledgling new brand in an industry that loves historic brands. Once the pedals started shipping, I was confident we could really build something that would last and be influential.”

Angelo: “Having musicians connect with something you’ve laboured so long on and taken very personally is extremely rewarding. It’s like releasing a new song. You work for months and months on it, pouring your heart and soul into every detail. And then the nerve-wracking moment comes where you release it and hope it connects with the outside world.”

What’s your best-selling product so far?

Terry: “Well, right now it’s Enzo, which is also the newest. It came from our obsession with synthesisers, especially the CS-80 and also Oberheim stuff. I had tried and failed many times to achieve a guitar-synth setup from existing gear and I was never happy with it.

“Angelo really nailed the sounds and tracking, which is insanely hard to do without a special pickup.”

Angelo: “I’ve always admired the intense creative tools that synth players have had at their disposal. Chick Corea, Vangelis and Keith Emerson were huge inspirations, and I wanted put those same tools into the hands of guitar players. I actually started work on the Enzo at the same time as our first pedal, the Ottobit Jr – the Enzo took more time, since I was continually refining the pitch-detection algorithms while designing our other pedals.”

What do you think are the biggest challenges and opportunities for the guitar industry in 2019?

Angelo: “I think the opportunities are limitless. I feel like we’re just seeing the tip of the iceberg as to what is possible with expanding the palette for guitar players.

“Synth players have had a head-start when it comes to the tools available to craft their sounds, but the tools for guitar players are catching up. We regard our pedals as instruments and I find it exciting that the pedalboard is turning into an extension of the instrument. It reminds me of how synth players interact with their modular-synth racks.”

What are your plans for the future?

Terry: “We always have multiple things on the horizon. The general theme that we stick to with our gear is that we always want to create something that acts as an instrument in and of itself and is inspired by a central idea or concept. I think our team is really grateful to be able to do what we do and to be creative on a daily basis. I hope we get to keep creating things for a long time.” *G*

For more info, head to meris.us

THE GUIDE

THE CLASS OF 2019

WORDS JOSH GARDNER

The Winter NAMM Show will be done and dusted by the time you read this, but if you've missed any coverage from the biggest event in the musical-instrument industry calendar, *Guitar.com* is the place to go. Next issue, we'll have even more from the Anaheim event but first, here are some of the best new products to get excited about in 2019…

ACOUSTICS

FENDER AMERICAN ACOUSTASONIC TELECASTER

With its American Performer series released last year, Fender's first big launch of 2019 shocked everyone by being, of all things, an American-made acoustic guitar. However, the reality is not quite so simple, and a lot more interesting. The fruits of three years of R&D, the American Acoustasonic Telecaster is designed to offer performing artists high-quality acoustic and electric tones thanks to the bespoke Fishman/Fender Acoustic Engine. With the ability to blend the two to taste, the Acoustasonic Telecaster's small body minimises the risk of onstage feedback, while Fender's new Stringed Instrument Resonance System (SIRS) ensures that the guitar still delivers the resonance and lively harmonics you'd want from a good acoustic. And with a mahogany Telecaster neck, it feels familiar, too. The Acoustasonic Telecaster might not be the first high-end electric/acoustic hybrid, but it's a bold change of pace for the world's biggest guitar company, and a fascinating musical tool.

ACOUSTICS CONTINUED

CORT MR720F

It's not all about high-end acoustic guitars in 2019, as South Korean mega-brand Cort has revealed the MR720F, an affordable instrument notable primarily because of the sustainable materials used. The top is Sitka spruce, while the neck is sustainable mahogany. There's also an ovangkol bridge and fretboard. The back and sides, however, are made from a material called EvoRose – a composite developed by Cort that is claimed to maintain the visual and sonic characteristics of wood.

MARTIN MODERN DELUXE SERIES

Martin has kicked off 2019 with the Modern Deluxe Series – a fresh take on the brand's Vintage Series. Offered in D-18, D-28, 000-28 and OM-28 formats, each guitar features a Sitka spruce Vintage Tone System (VTS) top, VTS Adirondack spruce braces, and a natural-protein-glue construction to produce "the rich, fully aged Martin tone that has inspired generations". Modern tweaks include a redesigned neck shape with a slightly asymmetrical contour, a lighter titanium truss rod and a carbon-fibre bridge plate. The company has also overhauled its Dreadnought Jr and Road Series, and a trio of new slope-shoulder dreadnoughts.

GODIN RIALTO

Canadian company Godin is promising that 2019 will be its "most ambitious year yet" and it's kicking off in style with the company's first-ever range of Godin-branded acoustic guitars. The most eye-catching example of the new range is the Rialto, named after a renowned movie theatre in the company's home of Montreal. In striking Satina Grey and with top-mounted tone and volume controls, it treads the line between acoustic and electric guitars. Time will tell if the sonics match the eccentric looks.

SANTA CRUZ ANCIENT KAURI OOO

Santa Cruz's NAMM showpiece guitar is stunning in this beautiful red burst finish, but it's what's underneath the Ancient Kauri's lacquer that's really special. The guitar's back, sides, rosette and headstock overlay are made from an Ancient Kauri tree which is radio carbon dated at 145,000 years old. The tree, buried during the last Great Cataclysm and starved of oxygen, was preserved until it was unearthed in New Zealand in the early 2000s, and later purchased by Santa Cruz. The top wood is made of 'Tunnel 13' redwood harvested in the Siskiyou mountains of Oregon from the wreckage of the 'last great train robbery of the West' in 1923. Ancient timber and the Wild West rolled into one great-looking guitar? Very cool indeed.

ELECTRICS

HARMONY GUITARS STANDARD & REISSUE MODELS

The reborn Harmony Guitars revealed a trio of modern takes on the company's classic models last year, and after a year of further R&D, the new standard line will be available in March this year. Also new for 2019 is the Juno – a reimagined take on the H44 body shape – and fans of old-school Harmonys will be delighted by a new range of vintage-faithful resissues, starting with the H19, H72 and H63.

FRET-KING FKV25JCAR JOHN JORGENSON

Fret-King has announced the FKV25JCAR John Jorgenson signature guitar, an update to his T-style signature model. Its body is solid American alder, rather than chambered, with a painted F-hole. As well as a Canadian maple neck and an Indian rosewood fingerboard, it has a matched pair of Wilkinson WVT single coils and two 'ghost' coils under the pickguard.

IBANEZ ANDY TIMMONS ATZ100

Among a wealth of new standard and signature models revealed by Ibanez this year, this 20th anniversary version of virtuoso Andy Timmons' personal guitar stands out from the more shred-focused crowd. The ATZ100 is the summation of two decades of collaboration between Timmons and Ibanez and features interesting appointments such as an ATZ S-Tech one-piece roasted-maple neck, three DiMarzio The Cruiser single-coil-sized humbuckers, and a Wilkinson-Gotoh VSVG vibrato bridge.

IBANEZ RG5120M

Ibanez's venerable RG line has been bolstered by some new Japan-made Prestige 5000 models for 2019, and the RG5120M is perhaps the most interesting new addition. The Frozen Ocean Blue shred machine features an African mahogany body with an ash top, and a Super Wizard HP neck that's built from a five-piece maple and wenge combination, which also has a 17-inch-radius bound birdseye-maple fretboard adorned with offset mother-of-pearl dot inlays. Most interesting, however, is the inclusion of Fishman's Fluence active humbuckers as standard.

EPIPHONE DC PRO

Epiphone has delved into its history to design the new-for-2019 DC PRO, which is inspired by the brand's 70s-era Del Rey Double Cut, this time pairing modern features with premium cosmetics. The guitar's mahogany body is capped with a AAA flame-maple veneer top, while the neck is also mahogany, featuring a custom C-shape with a 12-inch-radius pau ferro fretboard and classy pearloid-and-abalone inlays. Pickup-wise, there's a pair of Epiphone ProBuckers with coil-splits and a treble-bleed circuit that maintains tonal clarity even at lower volumes.

PRS SE PAUL'S GUITAR

The various iterations of Paul's Guitar have been the instrument that showcases Paul Reed Smith's most cutting-edge discoveries relating to great electric-guitar tone. By adding that to the company's more affordable SE range, Smith is bringing some of that learning to a wider audience than ever. With TCI 'S' Treble and Bass pickups delivering pure vintage tone, the mini-toggle switches allow true single-coil operation of both pickups for maximum versatility. The guitar is also available in three classic PRS shades – Amber, Aqua and Fire Red.

GRETSCH G6620T PLAYERS EDITION

Gretsch celebrated the 15-year anniversary of its fabled Custom Shop during NAMM 2019, and expanded its Players Edition with a range of new models and finishes. Resplendent in its new Round-Up Orange finish, the G6620T Players Edition Nashville Center Block Double-Cut with String-Thru Bigsby teams a maple top, body and headstock construction with a 22-fret ebony fingerboard sporting Neo-Classic thumbnail inlays, and a pair of High Sensitive Filter'Tron pickups. You'll also find a mean-looking Black Falcon and a Silver Sparkle G6229 Jet BT elsewhere in the range.

SCHECTER NICK JOHNSTON TRADITIONAL

This affordable signature model for the Canadian guitar virtuoso stands out among the pointy fare in Schecter's 2019 range. The Indonesian-made S-type offers all the functionality and playability that any technician would desire, but with classic looks. Sporting the classic combo of alder, maple and rosewood in the wood department, the guitar features a trio of the online fret-blazer's signature single coils and is available in either Atomic Green or Atomic Silver.

HERITAGE MASTERBUILT CUSTOM H-137

As you can see from our review on p110, Heritage Guitars produce fine modern takes on the iconic instruments made in the very same Kalamazoo factory back in the 1950s. Away from the production models, however, Heritage has released four new Masterbuilt Custom guitars that showcase the very best of what its luthiers can do. Most eye-catching of the four is the H-137, which features a beautifully figured curly maple top in Neptune Blueburst laid over a solid one-piece mahogany body.

AMPS

BLACKSTAR SUPER FLY

Blackstar has revealed an addition to its hugely successful and fantastic-sounding Fly range with the performance-focused Super Fly. Effectively a scaled-up version of the Fly, the Super Fly packs in two three-inch full-range speakers and 12 watts of power to deliver amplification for both electric and acoustic guitar, as well as vocals. A two-channel amp, channel one is an XLR/jack combi input for use with microphones or line-level instruments, while channel two is for electric or acoustic guitar. Each channel has an independent volume, three-band EQ and built-in reverb, while the guitar channel has an electric/acoustic voicing switch and switchable overdrive. It also has line in and out jacks, Bluetooth connectivity for playing along with your favourite tracks, plus a kickstand to angle the amp towards you. With a variety of extras including a long-life battery pack, padded carry bag, speaker mounting stand and an active extension cab, the Super Fly seems like the busker's dream.

SUPRO BLUES KING 12

Supro's new Blues King 12 amplifier is a 15-watter that aims to capture the sounds of early rock 'n' roll and the British Invasion. The amp boasts a single-ended, Class A 6L6 power amp, with a 12AX7 in the preamp. It comes with footswitchable gain and boost modes, and in the former mode, cascaded FETs unleash "face-melting levels of distortion and sustain", according to Supro. There's also a suitably retro in-built analogue spring reverb.

BOSS NEXTONE ARTIST

The brand-new dual-channel Nextone range features Boss's Tube Logic technology, which allows instant revoicing via four Class AB power amps, enabling you to alter your amp's character with the twist of a knob. The Nextone amps also feature built-in delay, reverb and tremolo, a custom 12-inch speaker, and are available in either 40- or 80-watt formats.

ORANGE TREMLORD 30

The TremLord is a 50s-inspired 30-watt combo that provides all the classic Orange valve tones you've come to expect, but with the addition of a tube-driven onboard effects. The tremolo has two footswitchable speeds as well as a depth knob. Interestingly, you can use the amp's post-tremolo effects loop to place the tremolo anywhere in a modern effects chain. As if that's not enough, the amp also serves up waves of rich, splashy reverberations from its two-spring tank.

EFFECTS

STRYMON VOLANTE MAGNETIC ECHO MACHINE

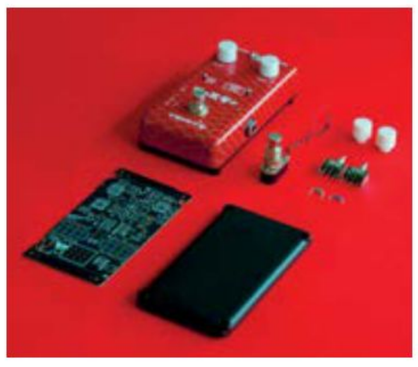
Strymon has become the effects brand of the stars and now the Californian company is going vintage, with the Volante Magnetic Echo Machine. Derived from the company's Magneto Four Head dTape Echo & Looper, the Volante is a stereo multi-head delay that also offers a looper and vintage spring reverb. With all the powerful sound-sculpting controls you'd expect from Strymon, this is sure to be a fascinating unit.

EARTHQUAKER DEVICES SWISS THINGS

This 'pedalboard reconciler' is a compact signal-routing interface for noisy rigs. Swiss Things has two footswitchable effects loops – one designed for low-impedance pedals such as drives and distortions, the other buffered for delays and modulations. There's a built-in 20dB boost and outputs for tuner and volume/expression pedals.

THORPYFX DEEP OGGIN

Designed with former Lovetone pedal designer Dan Coggins, the Deep Oggin is a fully analogue chorus/vibrato. With both wet and dry outputs, plus five knobs to control depth, rate, treble, volume and blend, the Deep Oggin is designed to be a rugged, supremely versatile and great-sounding chorus.



TEISCO EFFECTS

The newly reinvigorated Teisco brand previewed some new effects pedals at NAMM last year, and after further tweaking, the first range of effects will be released to the public in March this year. Housed in unique 'low profile' cases with quirky designs inspired by the firm's Japanese heritage, – and featuring equally individual analogue sounds inside – the initial three-pedal range will comprise the Fuzz, Boost and Delay units.

MAD PROFESSOR DOUBLE MOON

Mad Professor has unveiled the Double Moon, a modulation unit with a range of chorus, flanger and vibrato effects. With all-analogue circuitry and bucket-brigade signal paths, the Double Moon sports 11 modes: three chorus effects, three dual-chorus options, three flangers, a unique flanger-and-chorus, and vibrato. The Double Moon also has a control for modulation waveform and to modify regen settings.

LR BAGGS ALIGN SERIES CHORUS AND DELAY

LR Baggs has expanded its Align Series of acoustic pedals with a delay and a chorus pedal. The chorus is designed to add richness to your tone while maintaining clarity, and features a Size control to blend two different and interactive chorus modes together. The delay is specifically tuned to an acoustic guitar and is designed to add depth to your acoustic tone without getting into any ambient territory.

REVV G4

A successor to Revv's hugely successful G3 preamp pedal, the G4 is a brand-new design that aims to capture the thick, saturated sound of high-gain amp distortion. The G4 is effectively a pedal recreation of the gain channel from Revv's popular Generator 120 MKII amplifier, and promises everything from authentic rock and metal saturation to 70s- and 80s-style amplifier crunch.

TSAKALIS AUDIO WORKS SIX

Greek pedal-builder Tsakalis Audio Works has launched the Six – a combined boost, overdrive and distortion that claims to offer the sound of three classic boutique pedals in one box. Within the six-position mode knob you'll find faithful recreations of the Timmy, Bluesbreaker and King Of Tone, but with claims of added sensitivity and natural tones thanks to Tsakalis's 'cap-less technology'.

ACCESSORIES & RECORDING

AUDIENT SONO

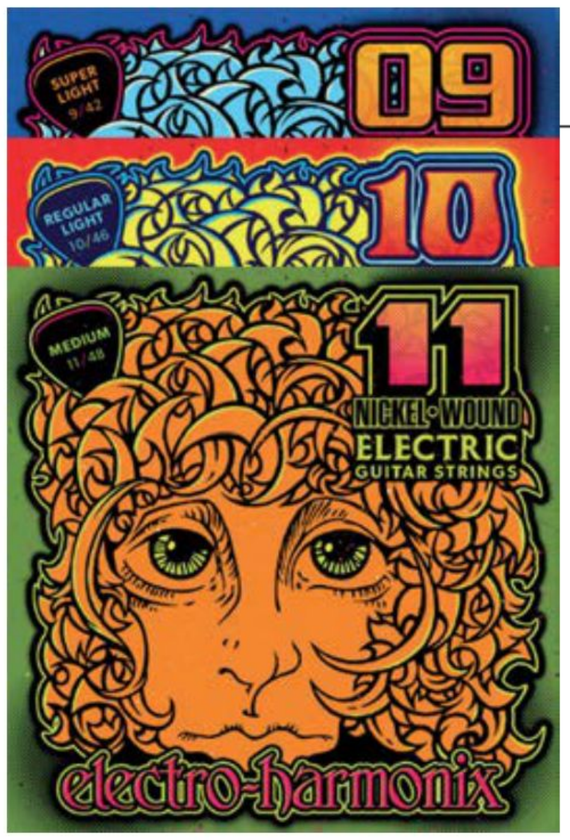
In a move that will no doubt please recording guitarists on a budget, British interface and console maker Audient has teamed up with Two Notes Audio Engineering to create the Sono – an all-in-one digital guitar interface that offers valve tone courtesy of a built-in preamp valve, plus amp/cab sims, re-amping and more. With all that for just £419, it promises a huge amount of studio-guitar quality for a very reasonable outlay.

PETERSON STROBOSTOMP HD

For over 70 years, Peterson's Strobe tuners have earned a well-deserved reputation for precision accuracy in tuning, and the new StroboStomp HD makes it easier than ever to use, with a large high-def colour LED backlit display. Add true and buffered bypass, 100 sweetened tunings, support for a variety of instruments and USB connectivity, and the StroboStomp HD is a complete package.

BOSS WAZA TUBE AMP EXPANDER

Hot on the heels of the success of Universal Audio's OX last year, Boss has launched the WAZA Tube Amp Expander – a device that aims to enhance the tube-amp experience by giving players more flexibility by combining a variable reactive-load box, active analogue power stage, mic'd cab simulator, IR loader and recording interface – all in one road-ready enclosure.



ELECTRO-HARMONIX GUITAR STRINGS

The venerable NY effects maker has ventured into guitar strings. The wound strings are constructed from high-carbon, hexagonal steel cores that are precision-wrapped by round nickel-plated steel; the unwound strings use the same core material. "[They'll] please the most discerning guitar players. They're long-lasting and deliver lightning-fast playability with great tone and intonation," says EHX founder Mike Matthews.

MONO M80 CLASSIC JUMBO ACOUSTIC CASE

Mono's M80 range of extremely rugged and reliable instrument cases have become a staple for musicians in recent years, and now owners of jumbo-sized acoustic guitars can enjoy the same level of protection. Protective innovations onboard include the firm's patented Headlock design and 'Sharkskin' protective shell, plus high-density foam bumpers to improve drop protection, and a lifetime warranty. **G**

Guitar.com PRESENTS

GRAND PACIFIC

Andy Powers takes Taylor into uncharted territory

THE INSIDE STORY AND DEFINITIVE REVIEW OF TAYLOR'S NEW 2019 GUITARS

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GRAND DESIGNS

Last year's V-Class launch saw Taylor's master guitar designer Andy Powers reinvent the internal architecture of the flat-top acoustic with breathtaking implications for projection, sustain and tuning. For 2019, Powers is ready to challenge your preconceptions about what a Taylor guitar is supposed to sound like. We head to Nashville to meet the company's new round-shoulder dreadnought, the Grand Pacific...

WORDS CHRIS VINNICOMBE | **PHOTOGRAPHY** ELEANOR JANE

In late 2017, when Taylor Guitars wanted to show a small group of guitar journalists its latest innovation, the company chose Carlsbad, a 35-minute drive north of downtown San Diego and home to Andy Powers, the master luthier and polymath to whom the creative torch has been passed from Bob Taylor himself. Bob's concerns now stretch way into the future as he immerses himself in sustainability projects separated by over 10,000 miles in Hawaii and Cameroon. And while Bob devotes his time to ensuring there's wood for tomorrow, Andy works with the timber of today to design the finest instruments in the company's 45-year history.

The airy barn that houses Andy's home workshop was the perfect environment in which to introduce the V-Class system. Within earshot of the surf that Powers was staring into when he experienced the Damascene moment that inspired his revolutionary bracing system, we heard its exceptional projection and sustain – and truly remarkable intonation – for the very first time.

Yet although the modernistic and ornate Builder's Edition K14ce was chosen as the instrument in which V-Class bracing would make its debut, it wasn't the first guitar that Powers had in mind when he set about reworking the internal architecture of the flat-top acoustic guitar a couple of years earlier. Even as people were being wowed by the K14ce in the packed Taylor booth at the Winter NAMM Show in January 2018, in a side room away from flashbulbs and live-streaming video, a handful of people were shown a slope-shoulder prototype that was a very different guitar indeed.

Fast-forward to September 2018, and that guitar had a name. In short, if you think you aren't a fan of 'the Taylor sound', don't turn the page just yet. While the cutaway-equipped Builder's Edition K14ce Grand Auditorium is Taylor in excelsis, the Grand Pacific has been crafted with an affinity for the crackle of vinyl records and an appreciation for an altogether older and more elusive steel-string acoustic sound.

BELOW Taylor unveiled its new Grand Pacific body shape to the press at the Southern Ground recording studio in Nashville

FACING PAGE Master guitar designer Andy Powers and VP of marketing Tim O'Brien talk journalists through the rationale behind the new Grand Pacific

PACIFIC RAILROAD

Although the ocean features in the Grand Pacific's name, Taylor Guitars chose to fly four hours east to Tennessee to unveil its new body shape to the guitar press in the Zac Brown Band's Southern Ground recording studio in Nashville. A city where songs have long been currency makes perfect sense as a location when Andy begins to explain how he arrived at this new take on the round-shoulder dreadnought format.

"I thought, well, there's all these sounds that I'm familiar with, that I love," Powers recalls. "I hear them on old records, I hear them on the music I grew up with – country-rock from Laurel Canyon and bluegrass. My dad, being a carpenter, would listen to bluegrass and country music all day long. You knew you could go through about four records between a morning, coffee break and lunchtime, you get through five in the afternoon. It paces you well, it accompanies you, it's a way to get through your life. So I grew up with this kind of music in our house, and working with my dad. I've dug more than my fair share of ditches listening to the The Louvin Brothers!

"So when I think about those songs, and listen to those sounds… in reality, I can't actually make those sounds with any of the guitars we have around. Even with many of the old guitars, it doesn't make the sound that we're familiar with because oftentimes, that's had some of its issues dealt with. It's like a composite sound. The sound of a guitar filtered through a microphone, with EQ, onto tape, onto a record. So I'm listening to these songs and these wonderful stories and thinking, I need a guitar that will make this sound. I should build a guitar that makes those kind of flavours."

NATTY DREAD

And build a guitar he did. Taylor's vice president of marketing Tim O'Brien jokes that they "spent a year debating" whether the Grand Pacific is a dreadnought or not. "It's about the size of a dreadnought,"

says Andy. "It's kind of shared in that bloodline, if you squint your eyes just right! But it really is a type of guitar that hasn't really existed before in this way. So it's loosely a slope-shouldered guitar.

"I designed this instrument using the V-Class architecture," Powers continues, "and it has all the attributes that we love about that – it has the volume and the sustain and this incredible intonation, a really nice playing action and everything – but it has a totally different character than the Grand Auditorium guitars that we built using that system. It's a whole different personality. It has, in some ways, a more mature voice in the way that it articulates each note. Now a modern GA, that's a great guitar. I love the way it sounds, it has a real vibrant precision. But this guitar has a warmth and clarity that I only find with kind of a more seasoned guitar."

The elegant simplicity and symmetry of the Grand Pacific body shape immediately lends the instrument more of a blue-collar vibe than many high-end Taylors. Although it's now standard on all of Taylor's El Cajon-made Grand Auditorium models, V-Class bracing debuted on one Builder's Edition instrument with a five-grand price tag. The Grand Pacific body shape has been made more accessible from day one by including the sapele/spruce 317 (from £1,919) alongside a pair of Builder's Editions – the mahogany/torrefied Sitka spruce 517 (from £2,999) and the rosewood/torrefied Sitka spruce 717 (from £3,179).

In a move Andy calls "pretty fresh for us", the Builder's Edition Grand Pacifics feature a new, compound neck profile that transitions from a soft V at the nut to a rounded C with a ridgeless heel. "When I look at the way I hold a guitar and the way that people play [in lower registers], I tend to wrap my hand a little more and the thumb goes around the neck," Andy notes. "But by the time I'm up here [in higher registers] on the fingerboard, it doesn't do that anymore. So we built a neck carve that actually transitions from one profile into another to get a little more friendly and familiar for a player."

Not a new idea, but certainly one that's new to Taylor. This player-friendliness continues, with radiused edges a continuing theme throughout Powers' Builder's Edition designs: "Combined with this rolled fingerboard edge, and these different kind of softened, rounded off corners," he reflects, "it just builds this guitar that's so comfortable and so approachable, for a whole lot of different playing styles."

PROBLEM SOLVING

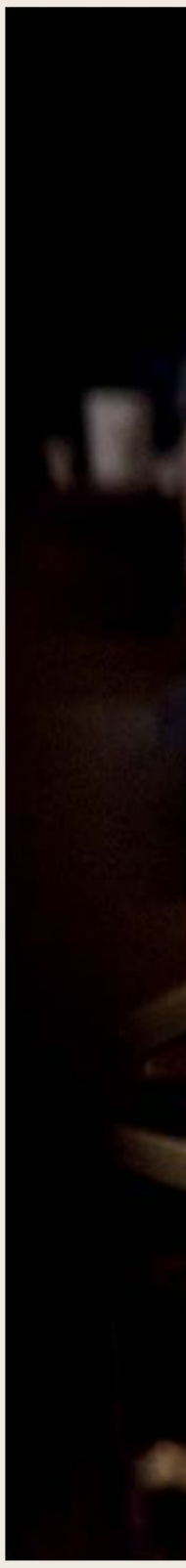
The V-Class bracing system isn't just about making an acoustic guitar shout louder and longer, it can also be used for control, and in this case, to tame some of the less-desirable characteristics associated with a particular body shape. While a dreadnought delivers more bass and bottom-end thump than a narrower-waisted design, this can often manifest itself as an overpowering plosive that causes problems for sound engineers. "A typical dreadnought builds low-end emphasis at the expense of the middle- and high-register notes," says Andy. "As a result, this body resonance effectively swallows up all the other notes, preventing the body from responding to them. The Grand Pacific body, powered by the V-Class architecture, generates low-end power without taking anything away from the rest of the register. You get smooth and warmly powerful notes, with consistency across the frequency spectrum."

The result is a guitar that delivers warmth and familiarity without getting swamped by bass, and retains clarity without the more clinical-sounding precision of a Grand Auditorium. It's a sound that immediately proves popular with the assembled journalists in the fabulous live room at Southern Ground, where even the figured koa flooring was supplied by Taylor, repurposed from seconds deemed unsuitable for guitars. In an impromptu acoustic jam, we notice the contrast between the 517's mahogany and 717's rosewood back and sides provides two distinct accents in the Grand Pacific's vocabulary. With the drier-toned mahogany guitar taking the lead role and the rosewood the rhythm, it's a particularly pleasing combination.

FACING PAGE, TOP Grammy-winner Alison Brown and Powers demonstrate the new Grand Pacific models

FACING PAGE, BOTTOM The legendary Gruhn Guitars store in Nashville

BELOW Powers and "patron saint of guitar" George Gruhn



CANDY STORE

After spending some time with the guitars at Southern Ground, we head a couple of miles south to the legendary Gruhn Guitars store, where Grammy-winning banjo player/guitarist/producer Alison Brown ably assists Andy in demonstrating the Grand Pacific in the context of a series of duo performances. "The guitar felt so alive it felt like it was going to jump out of my hands," says Brown of her first encounter with a V-Class Taylor.

Powers describes George Gruhn as "one of the patron saints of guitar", and the famed guitar dealer and historian is a fan of Andy's work. Gruhn's unique taxonomical approach to categorising the instrument came from a passion for zoology; his doctorate in the psychology of animal behaviour at the University Of Tennessee was abandoned when Hank Williams Jr came calling in early 1969, having heard that the young student had lots of old Martin guitars.

"It's not simply about old instruments," says Gruhn, "because what makes an instrument good is not simply whether it's old, or rare. My father was a pathologist and there are plenty of stories about him being delighted when making an extremely interesting diagnosis, but often, this diagnosis was not good news for the patient! In general, instruments that are extraordinarily rare are rare for a reason. It was a commercial failure, at least when it was it new. Even some fabulously good instruments were commercial failures when new.

"The quality of new guitars being made today is better than it was when I opened up my store. And that was 48-and-a-half years ago. I think Taylor's making the best guitars they've ever made in the history of the company. These are by far the finest Taylors I've ever heard. They are also some of the finest new guitars I've ever played. They are right on up there with some custom luthier-built instruments that are $20,000 plus. And some of those luthier-built guitars I'd view as fine pieces of furniture. These are fine musical instruments and they are more musical-sounding than most. They are very special – they are as versatile as any acoustic guitar I've played."

FACING PAGE, TOP Powers and friends demonstrate the range with an in-the-round gig at Nashville's historic Bluebird Cafe venue

FACING PAGE, BOTTOM As well as being one of the world's foremost guitar designers, Powers is also an adept multi-instrumentalist

BELOW Nickel Creek's Sean Watkins was among the performers

On Andy specifically, George is similarly complimentary: "I'm impressed with the depth of knowledge that Andy has. We were able to talk about harpsichords and violins and mandolins and viola da gambas and lutes and virtually anything else… he knew them, and he understood what makes them tick and the history of these instruments. When it comes right down to it, what makes a guitar good is not how old it is, it's first and foremost the design.

"Without a good design, it doesn't matter how good the workmanship or the materials are. It's like being up in an airplane. If you're 40,000 feet up in the air and it has a bad aerodynamic design – it can be made from wonderful materials, it can have great workmanship, gold-plated fixtures, mahogany panelling – you'll die. Workmanship is very important. With a good design and bad workmanship that is structurally unstable, the design will fail. But good design is first and foremost. It has to have good structural workmanship, and materials do matter."

Addressing Powers directly, Gruhn says: "You understand design. You understand all of those aspects and how to do it in a factory setting in quantity. But you also understand the tradition, how we got here, what does work and the pathology of old instruments. So you know what fails. If you see the patterns repeatedly… you stop doing that! You don't have to do everything in the way it was done 50 or 100 years ago, if you see things that consistently fail.

"When you are designing a new guitar you can look at all the evolutionary history and you can see which organ systems fail at what point. We don't use the same kind of plastic that we know rots… and that's why all those 60s Gretsches need rebinding. And now even D'Aquistos do. So you don't do that. You have a wealth of knowledge that you are actually applying.

"I see a lot of things on these new Taylor guitars that I haven't seen on any vintage guitar. The V bracing is new, and it's fascinating to hear the intonation that you get on these when there's nothing

about the nut that would affect intonation, nothing about the fret scale that would affect intonation, nothing about the bridge saddle or bridge design. But to the brain, it processes that as 'this intonates differently'. And all those discordant chords that you can demonstrate on other guitars, played on this, the bracing pattern makes it sound in tune. There's no harmonic resonances that are fighting each other. I think you have achieved something that I haven't heard before on a flat-top guitar."

IN THE ROUND

Later, we head from Gruhn Guitars to Nashville's legendary Bluebird Cafe, the intimate 90-seater venue where Garth Brooks was signed after a showcase performance in 1987 and where the likes of Taylor Swift, Keith Urban and a host of Nashville's biggest stars have appeared over the years. Inside, we're treated to an in-the-round performance hosted by Andy Powers alongside Nickel Creek's Sean Watkins, singer-songwriter Sarah Masen and former Taylor product-specialist-turned-solo-artist Michael Lille. When not taking the lead role, Andy effortlessly sits in on mandolin and slide to provide accompaniment. The feelgood atmosphere sees songs punctuated by stories and laughter and it's precisely this kind of warmth Powers sought to evoke when designing the Grand Pacific.

By the end of a long and enjoyable day, first impressions suggest the Grand Pacific might just be that elusive best-of-both-worlds flat-top. With all of the benefits of a modern Taylor – precision manufacture, tuning stability and environmentally conscious materials – the Grand Pacific's sound has a warmer, less crystalline hue and more of an old-time drawl in its voice. We'd call that a job well done. *G*

Turn the page to read our review of all three of Taylor's new-for-2019 Grand Pacific instruments

TOP (l to r) Sean Watkins, Andy Powers, singer-songwriter Sarah Masen and former Taylor product specialist Michael Lille

THE GREAT DIVIDE

Andy Powers on how the electric guitar informs modern acoustic building

“Having built and restored guitars, appreciated and played a lot of instruments, I’ve kind of assembled almost my own timeline of instrument history. A lot of us talk in terms of pre-war guitars and post-war guitars. Really, from a builder’s perspective, other than the quantity, not much actually changed with the guitar itself. Sure, there’s some subtle distinctions, little tweaks and things, but the guitar largely didn’t change after World War II.

“I have this timeline where I look at instruments developing, with this great divide between all the instruments from antiquity up until this divide, and all the instruments that come after it.

“To me, the great divide is the electric guitar. It was not World War II, as most people would place it. It was the electric guitar, because that was the first time that we really have a systemic approach to making a sound.

“Up until that point, an instrument is developed and it makes a sound. You have a violin, you have a piano, you have a guitar, you have a clarinet, whatever… it does this thing and it makes that sound. You either like it, or you don’t. You choose it, or you don’t, but that’s what it is. And that’s the way instruments were developed and built.

“Of course, the electric guitar starts before World War II, with the ES-150 et cetera, and lap steels playing Hawaiian music, you have those precursors. But really, I look at the solidbody electric guitar and go, okay, that was significant in the development of modern music and in a way, modern culture. Because now you have this thing where you need an amp, you have a cord and you have a guitar… but because it’s got components, a systemic approach to making a sound, you get to choose what it sounds like. That’s an interesting development.

“Now you can take a Telecaster and plug it into a Champ or a Deluxe and it makes a sound, or plug it into a Vox or a Marshall and it makes a totally different sound! You’ve got these elements where you can mix and match and it gives the player a lot of flexibility. I don’t see instruments ever being the same, from then on.

“As a modern guitar maker, I’ve only lived on this side of the divide. Taylor lives on this side of the divide. So we look at this and go, there’s a lot of things that systemic approach gave us, that the electric guitar gave us, that I am totally not willing to give up. I’m totally not willing to give up a neck that plays well, a good action, accurate intonation. I’m stuck with that, I want that, I’m gonna keep it. And yet there are parts of an instrument’s development that I do appreciate that came from before that great divide. I want that projection. I want that volume. I want that sustain, I want the articulation. All those really good attributes that are just inherent to a good musical instrument, whether it’s a mandolin, a violin, a guitar or whatever. Those things are really interesting to me.

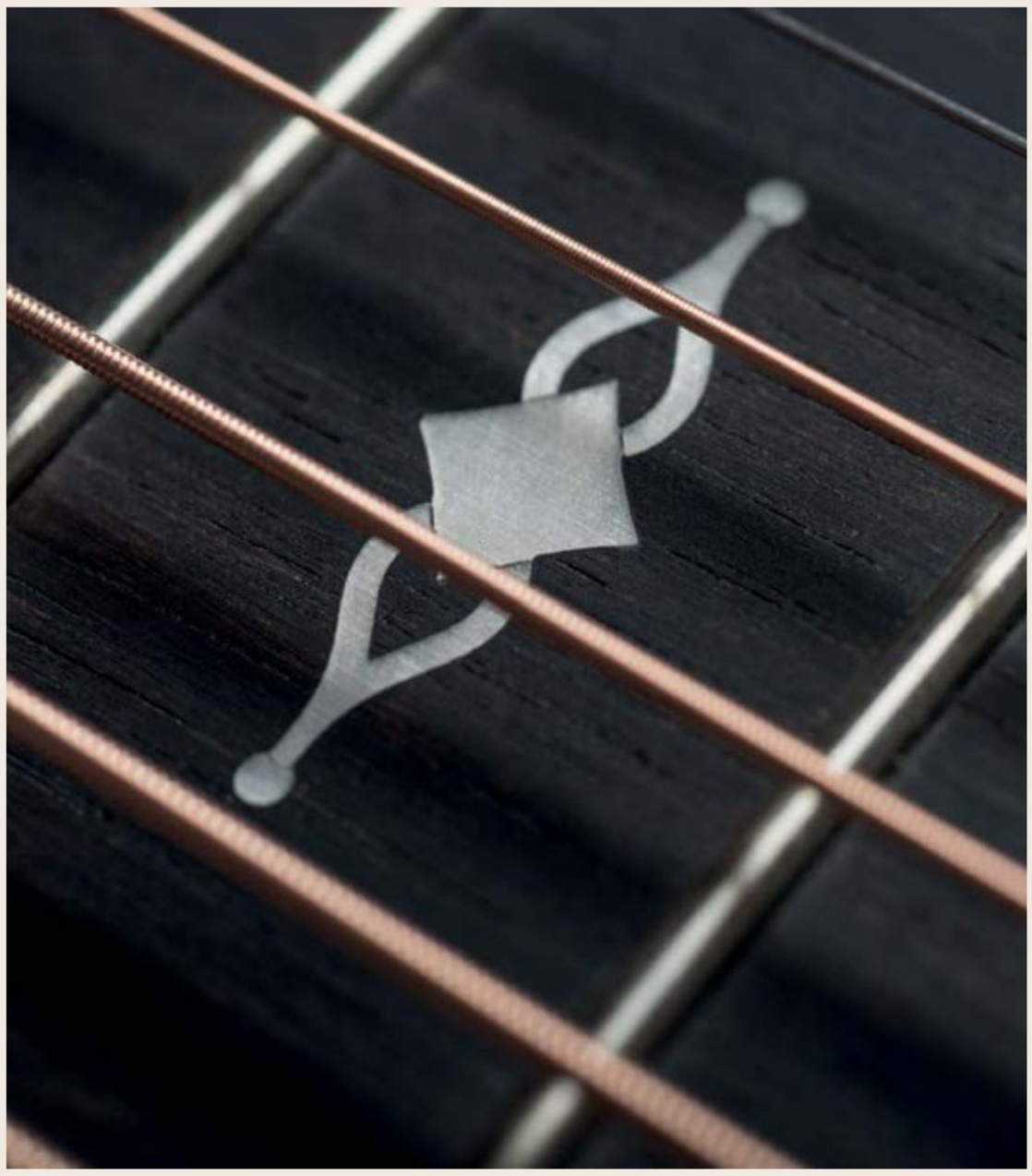
“And in the modern world, most guitar makers to one degree or another have ignored that. So what we’re trying to do, especially with this guitar, is go: ‘I want the parts of a modern guitar that I want, I want consistency, I want control.’ And with the V-Class idea, it allows us so much ability to shape what we want the sound to be like. We can choose these different aspects. I love old machines and old cars more than most people, but there’s a lot of what we gain from a modern set of tools and modern manufacturing techniques… we’re spoilt, really. If we have those tools available to us, absolutely we should use them.”

REVIEW

2019 GRAND PACIFIC MODELS

After 45 years at the cutting edge of modern acoustic manufacturing, do Andy Powers' new Grand Pacific guitars see Taylor wind back the clock and deliver more vintage-inspired tones? Find out as we review the 317e, Builder's Edition 517e and Builder's Edition 717e

WORDS HUW PRICE | **PHOTOGRAPHY** ELEANOR JANE



Until now, the considerable charms of V-Class bracing have been reserved for Taylor's Grand Auditorium models. 2019 sees the company launch a new body shape featuring the game-changing architecture on the inside, along with a tone and aesthetic designed to break new ground for the brand. As radical departures go, Grand Pacific is unlikely to trump the launch of V-Class itself, largely because this was the most radical rethink in flat-top acoustic bracing since CF Martin became the first X-Man. However, the new Grand Pacific body style is a very significant move for Taylor, and is likely to widen the company's appeal to include more vintage-minded guitar players.

A slope-shouldered dreadnought in essence, the Grand Pacific outline is a far cry from the modern utilitarianism we've come to associate with Taylor, and it feels as comfy and familiar as it looks. However, as we're about to discover, each of the trio of Grand Pacific models on test offers something very new, in a seemingly traditional package. All three guitars are fitted with nickel-plated die-cast tuners and Taylor's Expression System 2 electronics. They come in deluxe hard-shell cases and have been strung with medium Elixir Phosphor Bronze strings.

The 317e may be the entry-level version here, but there's nothing conspicuously downmarket about it. Despite the new outline and its internal architecture, in outward appearance, it's a fairly regulation Taylor 300 Series instrument: a perfect gloss finish protects the pale Sitka spruce top, with satin on the sapele back, sides and mahogany neck.

Black-plastic body binding matches the West African ebony bridge and flawless fingerboard. Brown streaks enhance the ebony headstock veneer, while the inlaid peghead motif echoes the markers between 20 well-dressed frets. Alternating black and white rosette bands are used for the purfling and a moulded plastic cover conceals the trussrod.

The 517e's specs may appear superficially similar but, as you would expect from a Builder's Edition instrument, the look and feel is very different. The neo-tropical mahogany back and sides have the look of a higher-quality tone timber than sapele and beneath the all-over Silent Satin finish, the colour is a deeper and richer reddish brown. Although it's hard to discern through the gorgeous Wild Honey Burst finish, the top is actually torrefied Sitka spruce.

The only obvious use of plastic we can point to on this guitar is grained ivoroid, which has been

KEY FEATURES

TAYLOR 317E
PRICE £2,099 (inc. case)
DESCRIPTION All-solid electro-acoustic 6-string guitar. Made in the USA
BUILD Sitka spruce top with sapele back and sides, neo-tropical mahogany neck, West African ebony bridge, fingerboard and peghead overlay, 14th-fret neck join, Taylor nickel-plated tuners, graphite nut and Micarta saddle
SCALE LENGTH 647.7mm/25.5"
NECK WIDTH 44.6mm at nut, 54.6mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 20mm at first fret, 22mm at 9th fret
STRING SPACING 37.6mm at nut, 55.7mm at bridge
WEIGHT 2.15kg/4.74lb
ELECTRICS Taylor Expression System 2
LEFT HANDERS No extra charge
OPTIONS 317 model available without Expression System for £1,919
FINISH Clear-gloss top, satin back and sides

8/10 **It looks more like a conventional Taylor, but the V-Class bracing elevates the tone and intonation**

inlayed into the ebony peghead overlay and ebony fingerboard. You could include the Micarta saddle, too, but the dominant theme is organic, with wood and fibre binding, purfling and inlays. It's all quite subtle and understated, with browns as soft as the body rims and rolled fingerboard edges. Stylistically, there's certainly a nod to tradition, but there's no sense in which Taylor is trying too hard to be retro.

Moving over to the 717e, again we have torrefied Sitka spruce. But this time, thanks to the top's deeper hue compared to the 300 Series model's standard top, it's clearer to the eye. The supposed structural and sonic benefits of heat-treating spruce have been well documented and we offer no arguments to the contrary. Very few builders, however, manage to utilise the changes in colour that the process brings about to such an advantage. This top looks fabulous, with the kind of reddish, honeyed tone that we might usually associate with cedar.

The 517e's sunburst slightly obscures the rosette, but here, the contrasting bands of black, sapele and maple show up beautifully. Like the 517e, the 717e has an ebony truss-rod cover and ebony bridge pins. Besides the mother-of-pearl headstock and fingerboard inlays, the big difference is in the guitar's rosewood back and sides. The rosewood is Indian in origin and although not especially dark, the grain is vivid and attractive. It certainly provides sufficient contrast to make the redness of the sapele bindings really pop. Although we appreciate the 517's Wild Honey Burst finish, the 717's natural top just edges it in the looks department and really enhances Taylor's graceful new take on the slope-shouldered dreadnought shape.

IN USE

Despite its quick response and naturally bright tone, the 317e has a remarkably balanced and even character; it's a particularly well-mannered guitar. Starting out in DADGAD, there's no trace of boominess and wherever you play on the neck, fretted notes and open strings ring out clearly and with equal volume. It's as though high-end studio equalisation and compression has already been applied – by a very competent recording engineer. The downside to that balance is you don't get any significant change in timbre when you move from strumming the strings close to the end of the fingerboard to the back of the soundhole. To achieve a more extreme tonal contrast, you have to attack the strings closer to the bridge to draw out those twangier tones with shorter sustain.

The tonal character remains similarly consistent, irrespective of playing intensity – if you prefer an acoustic guitar that mellows and darkens when you play soft, but gains brightness and bite as you play harder, that's not what the 317e is all about. That said, none of this should be taken as criticism per se, because it's a guitar that's ideally suited to recording applications and can make those of us with imperfect playing technique sound rather more polished than we really are.

ELECTRIC FEEL

If you primarily play electric guitar, but require an acoustic that you can pick up without having to readjust your technique to any great extent, you'll like the 317e. This applies in particular to fingerstyle; all of the strings have a rounded tonal quality, which means the wound strings don't pop out and the plain strings retain body and punch even in the higher registers. And as we have come to expect from Taylor's V-Class bracing, the intonation is remarkably good. It's a very fine-sounding guitar but if you're a dedicated acoustic player, you may find that once you've been playing it for 30 minutes or so, you've already heard pretty much everything it has to offer.

Given the similarity in materials and its identical body dimensions, we're surprised how different the 517e sounds and feels. Straight out of the case, this guitar's tone is fuller, darker and more seasoned and now we can hear those tonal variations when altering the area of attack and adjusting playing intensity.

Despite a fatter and more rounded neck profile – and it's one that could even be described as 'vintage' – the 517e feels like a lighter and more streamlined instrument than the 300 Series model. Designer Andy Powers has described how the profile transitions between the headstock and body ends, and in use, it's a subtle thing. We detect the merest hint of a V and softer shoulders at the cowboy end, which gradually becomes rounder, and the result is a very comfortable neck shape that provides substance without unwieldy bulk.

Some sonic characteristics are shared with the 317e. First and foremost, the tone has the same evenness and string-to-string balance, and there's the sense that the sound has been 'pre produced'. Again, the bass is boom-free, but the 517e delves deeper into the frequency range for some chest-filling gravitas. It's a similar story at the other end, because without sounding brighter as such, the 517e has a more airy

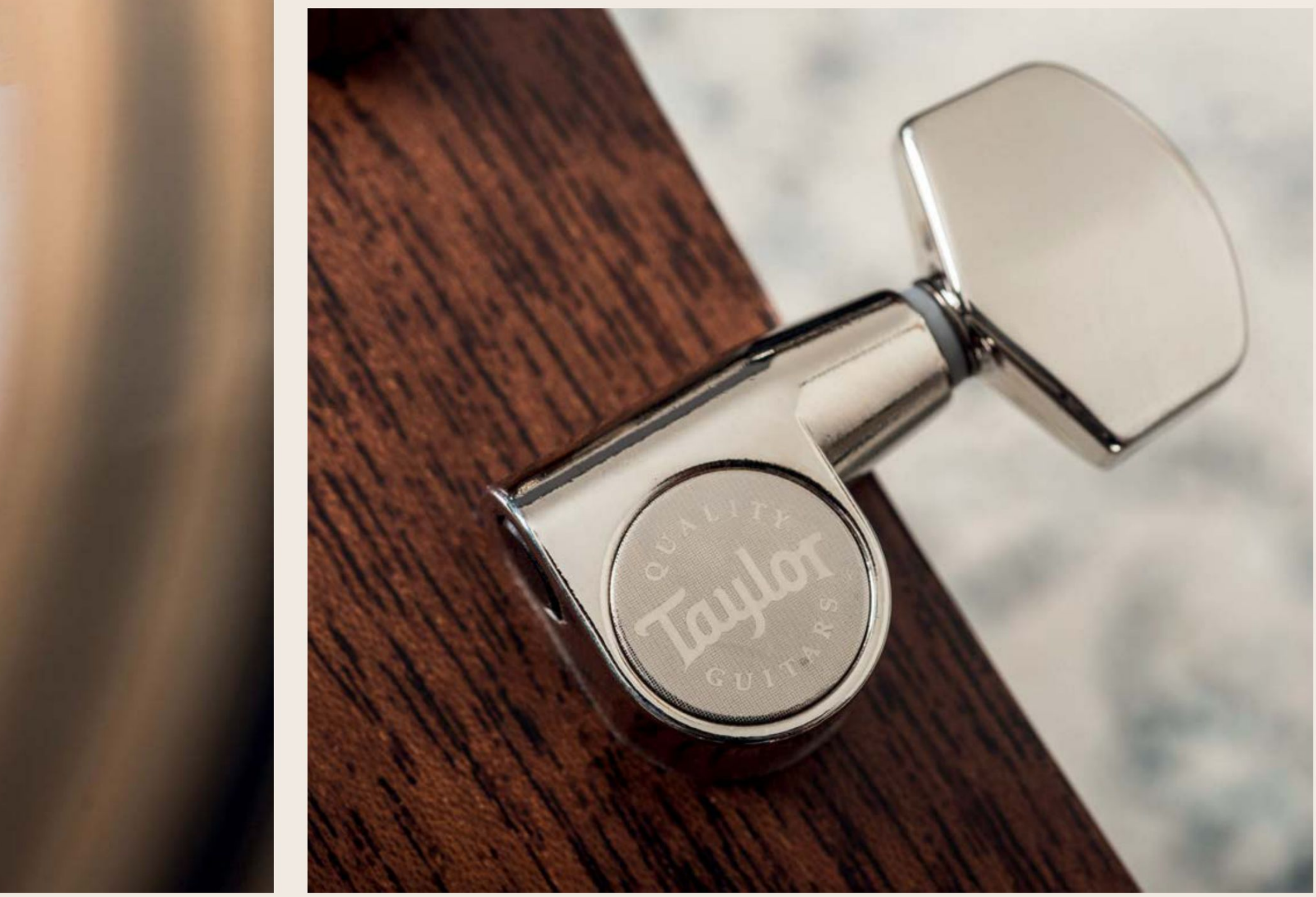
KEY FEATURES

TAYLOR BUILDER'S EDITION 517E
PRICE £3,359 (inc. case)
DESCRIPTION All-solid electro-acoustic 6-string guitar. Made in the USA
BUILD Torrefied Sitka spruce top with neo-tropical mahogany back and sides, neo-tropical mahogany neck with compound profile, West African ebony bridge, fingerboard and peghead overlay, 14th-fret neck join, Taylor nickel-plated tuners, graphite nut and Micarta saddle, sapele binding, black/maple purfling, black/maple/sapele rosette, ebony bridge pins
SCALE LENGTH 647.7mm/25.5"
NECK WIDTH 44.7mm at nut, 54.8mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 20mm at first fret, 23mm at 9th fret
STRING SPACING 37.7mm at nut, 55.5mm at bridge
WEIGHT 2.08kg/4.58lb
ELECTRICS Taylor Expression System 2
LEFT HANDERS No extra charge
OPTIONS 517 available without Expression System for £2,999 (Natural) and £3,179 (Wild Honey Burst)
FINISH Silent Satin with Wild Honey Burst top (as reviewed), also available with Natural top (£3,179)

9/10 **Classic US flat-top DNA, improved balance and outstanding intonation combine – with addictive results**

QUALITY
Taylor
GUITARS
ESTABLISHED in 1974
MADE in EL CAJON, CALIFORNIA, USA
SERIAL
1107238134
MODEL
317e
GP
DREADNOUGHT
GRAND PACIFIC
1107238134
ANDY POWERS Master Guitar Designer

Taylor



treble response that floats over the main body of the sound. It's somehow distinct, yet very much part of the whole.

The tone is a touch more like an old-school dreadnought, with a hint of mid scoop but none of the common downsides. It's also a guitar that can lend itself to muscular rhythm parts just as well as delicate finger-picking, and we find its tone more complex and involving than that of the 317e. Where the 317e conforms more closely to what many players expect from a Taylor, the 517e moves things forward by combining some elements of classic American flat-top tone with modern playability, improved balance and outstanding intonation. A suitable analogy might be that of a current production sports car that ticks all of the 'retro' style boxes, but also benefits from modern brakes, suspension and power steering.

All three of these Taylors feature diagonal back bracing, which appears fairly square and robust compared to rounded Martin-style back braces and Lowden's tall-and-thin type. When reviewing acoustic guitars, it's our usual custom to tap the backs to determine how lively and ringy they are. Here, we notice that the clearest and loudest tap tones are found in the upper bout and the area behind the soundhole. Across the lower bout it seems slightly damped, and all three guitars are similar in this regard. Perhaps this contributes to the Grand Pacific's deep but controlled bass response; however, the 717e has the liveliest back and the cleanest tap tones.

Of the three instruments featured here, the 717e also has the smoothest and most refined tone. There's no mid scoop and it has the most even string-to-string balance of all. It could be that the more forward midrange is de-emphasising the bass and treble extremes, but we don't find the 717e sounds as deep or as airy as the 517e. Again, this is an observation rather than a criticism, because we are in the realm of subjective taste rather than good, better or best.

SONIC TRUTH

The 717e sounds and plays like a very high-end, hand-built guitar – the type that'd cost substantially more if it had been made by an artisan luthier. There isn't a harsh tone to be had, the sonic character is boldly clear and assertive and there are plenty of dynamics and tonal variations.

Yet despite all that, something keeps drawing us back to the 517e. It's just that bit punchier, earthier and grittier. If the 717e won the aesthetic battle, the

517e is the most characterful and interesting-sounding guitar in a very strong field.

Moving into the electrified world, the differences between our trio of review guitars are less apparent. Taylor's Expression System isn't our favourite acoustic amplification method, but it's better than many, and the plugged-in tone certainly has an acoustic quality.

Through a mixing desk and nominally flat-response speakers, we detect a slight brittleness. Fortunately, the treble and bass controls provide a wide and powerful sweep, so Taylors equipped with the Expression System 2 can produce enjoyable and musical tones in a wide variety of amplification scenarios. Output levels are very strong, too, but we do hear a phase-y hollowness, particularly from the second (B) and first (top E) strings that might benefit from some carefully targeted parametric equalisation from a preamp or mixing desk. As Andy Powers himself acknowledges, Taylor's pickup system doesn't work for every player, and you can save yourself a tidy sum by choosing a fully acoustic version of any model (see Key Features).

CUTTING EDGE

If we were asked to come up with a neat summary of what Andy Powers has been doing at Taylor over the last few years, the phrase 'knocking off the edges' springs to mind. We're speaking literally and figuratively, because you can see it, feel it and hear it.

The crisp and square-edged plastic binding has been replaced by rounded-over body edges that are closer to a Telecaster's chamfer than that of regular acoustics. Although the 317e has Taylor's knife-edge heel, both Builder's Edition guitars have a softer look and feel. But their most noticeable change has to be the redesigned bridge, with its more graceful curves and rounded corners. We find the 'curve wing' shape a big aesthetic improvement, but others may prefer the iconic Taylor original.

Some eyebrows may raise at the choice of synthetic materials for nuts and saddles on guitars in this price range, but equally, an increasing number of players prefer to see no animal-derived materials used on their instruments. Although the nickel-plated tuners perform flawlessly, we'd like to have seen smaller ebony buttons grace the headstocks on the Builder's Edition models, but these are minor points.

Overall, things at Taylor have been on an upward trajectory for some time and we see no sign of the company losing momentum under the watchful eye of its master guitar designer. **G**

KEY FEATURES

TAYLOR BUILDER'S EDITION 717E
PRICE £3,359 (inc. hard case)
DESCRIPTION All-solid electro-acoustic 6-string guitar. Made in the USA
BUILD Torrefied Sitka spruce top with Indian rosewood back and sides, neo-tropical mahogany neck with compound profile, West African ebony bridge, fingerboard and peghead overlay, 14th-fret neck join, Taylor nickel-plated tuners, graphite nut and Micarta saddle, sapele binding, black/maple purfling, black/maple/sapele rosette, ebony bridge pins
SCALE LENGTH 647.7mm/25.5"
NECK WIDTH 44.5mm at nut, 54.6mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 20mm at first fret, 23mm at 9th fret
STRING SPACING 37.8mm at nut, 55.4mm at bridge
WEIGHT 2.35kg/5.18lb
ELECTRICS Taylor Expression System 2
LEFT HANDERS No extra charge
OPTIONS 717 available without Expression System for £3,179 (Natural) and £3,359 (Wild Honey Burst)
FINISH Silent Satin with Natural top (as reviewed), also available with Wild Honey Burst top (£3,539)
CONTACT Taylor
taylorguitars.com

9/10 **The most refined and balanced V-Class guitar yet, with fabulous looks and a serious high-end vibe**

Guitar.com EDITOR'S CHOICE

The Sustain... Listen To It

With models sporting the new Grand Pacific body shape set to define 2019 for the company he founded, we caught up with Bob Taylor to discover more about the conservation projects that have become his labour of love

INTERVIEW CHRIS VINNICOMBE

We last spoke about sustainability around the time of the V-Class bracing launch in January 2018. How have your projects in Cameroon and Hawaii developed over the last 12 months?
"Cameroon is developing as far as our cutting, work in the forest and importantly, our planting programme, which we call The Ebony Project, goes. Our employees are happy. We've developed a few nurseries for growing ebony saplings from seeds, and this year was a very good fruiting year in the Congo Basin, being in huge contrast to the last two years, when there was almost no fruit.

"This means that this year, we were able to collect seeds and plant in our nurseries – about 25,000 plants. We're learning that they must be at least two years old before we can plant in a village. This April, we'll do our largest planting yet of several-hundred ebonies in a village outside of our city, using the plants we started two years ago, with more planting soon after that in another village. The biological study of the ecology of ebony that we're doing is coming along and we'll begin to publish scientific reports soon. So we're very excited.

"In Hawaii, we've purchased our own land of 560 acres, have a reforestry plan written and approved, and have completed the civil engineering for the road system. Work will start in a few months and planting begins towards the end of 2019, an eight-year plant-out totalling more than 100,000 trees, maybe up to 150,000 to start, which will be thinned to lesser numbers as the years go by and the trees increase in size. [We've made] huge progress on understanding and making plants. And we've been invited in to more private lands to do selective cutting and planting. This project is really going well."

BELOW Bob Taylor grading ebony fingerboards with Crelicam employees Emma and Michel

FACING PAGE, TOP (l to r) Crelicam employees Francois, Etunde, Michel, Emini, Mbala and Jeàn

FACING PAGE, BOTTOM Sustainably harvested abalone shells from community fishing cooperatives along Mexico's Baja California peninsula

How to do reconcile the current US administration's message on the environment with your own conservation efforts and the need for sustainable wood supplies in the guitar industry?
"The winds of governments change to and fro. Meanwhile, the world goes on and we're planting trees and drawing attention to that example. So in a way, we are doing something about it. It's inevitable

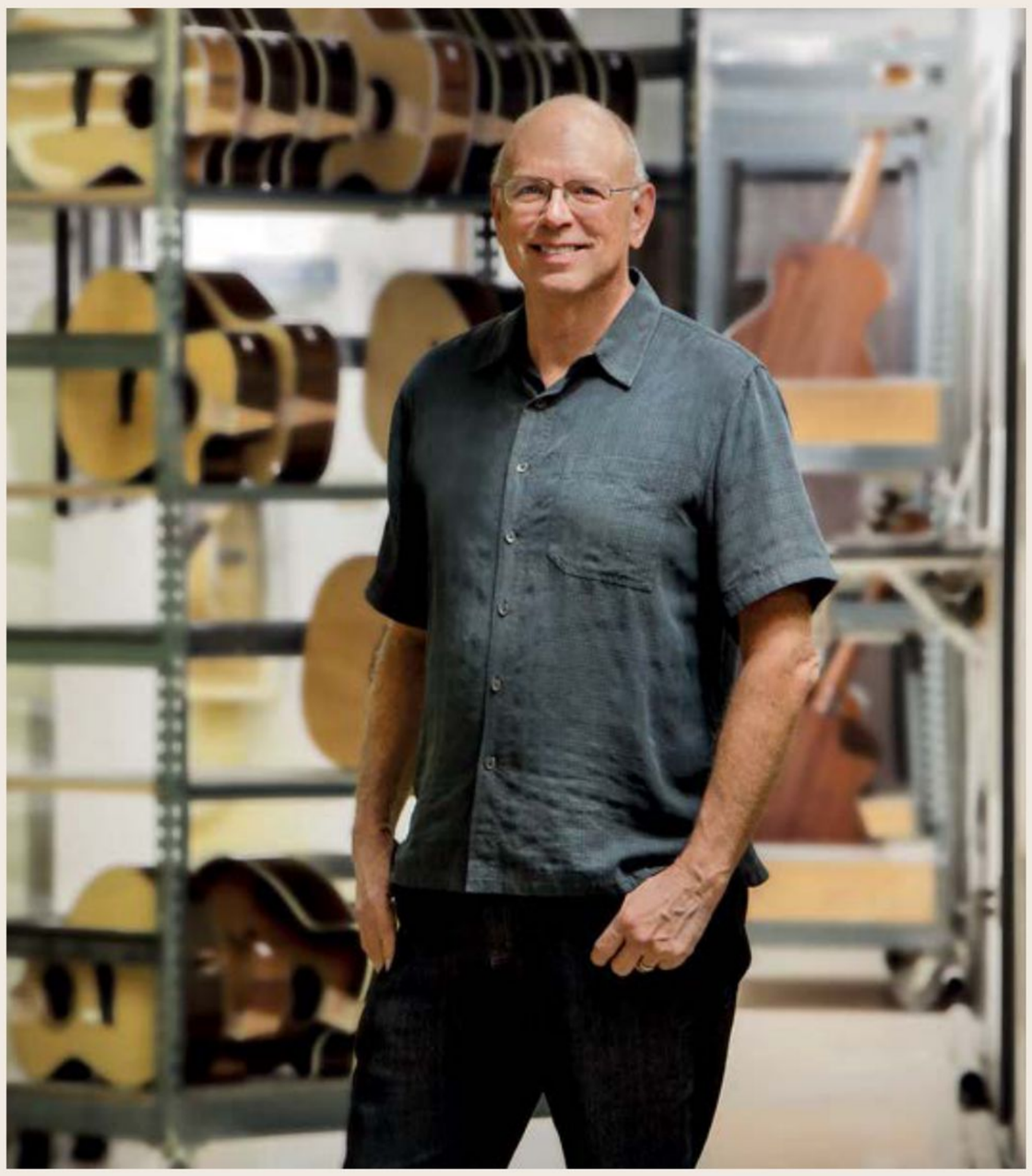
that both opinions will exist at the same time; those who feel the environment is in good condition and those who feel we must do something to stop the decline. I belong to the latter opinion and that guides what I do. I believe that conservation will win out in the end. Hopefully, before the end!"

For obvious reasons, when people think about sustainability in the guitar industry, wood dominates the conversation. Yet there are many other materials that go into guitar manufacture, whether as a part of the instrument itself or shipping packaging, et cetera. We remember you telling the story of diving for the abalone when you built your first guitars… as we head in 2019, how confident do you think guitar companies can be that materials such as abalone have been ethically or sustainably sourced?

"Funny you mention abalone! Over the last two years, we have been able to help a large Korean company that processes the abalone that makes its way into most of the guitar world, by us being the liaison between them and the well-managed abalone harvest trade in Baja California, Mexico. We have inroads and relationships there and so I'm personally very happy with what I know about that source. It's very well controlled.

"And in many ways, that's all we makers can do, is to roll up our sleeves and help people land in the right place to do things right. Some industries like packaging are so vast that no matter what we chose to do it won't change the good, or bad, habits of that industry, except for being a client of theirs and making our wishes known. In that way, we can have an effect.

"And just to mention, over-packaging is a gripe of mine and yet I find myself participating in things I don't like in that area because it's not the hill I want to die on quite yet – I don't have a better answer. But I will say that I'm an optimist and feel that improvements will continue to find their way into the world.



Just this week, our city of San Diego banned styrofoam packaging in food-service stores. That dwarfs anything I can do."

For the sake of the uninitiated, if people reading this take one thing away with them about sustainability in the guitar industry, what would you like it to be?
"Be a conscientious, aware player, even on the day that you buy your own guitar, where you have a chance to put your money where your ideals are. Accept change if you see a maker trying to make those changes for the betterment of the environment. Meanwhile, Taylor will always try to do 99 per cent of that work for you, so you don't have to settle for less."

Finally, how do you feel about the new Grand Pacific guitars?
"Well, what can I say? I wrote recently that I have a new grandson and I just love that little boy. He's not my child, but he is my kid's child and the feeling is amazing. Andy's guitars are like that to me, emotionally, it's all Andy and yet still part me.

"Apart from that emotional feeling, it's a fine guitar and one I probably would not have been able to make myself. I don't have that skill, believe it or not, in my ears to consider it needs to be made, or in my understanding of a top and how it can be made. It's a better guitar than I make, and sets a new bar for us at Taylor.

"I think many players will love it and put it to use and I believe Taylor, through the Grand Pacific, will make another mark in the musical world. I also think that it's another accomplishment of Andy's that will continue to build his reputation as being among the best guitar builders alive." ***G***

Find out more about the team behind The Ebony Project and Bob Taylor's sustainability projects in Cameroon by visiting taylorguitars.com/ebonyproject

TOP Bob Taylor and Dr Zac Tchoundjeu, a leading expert on agroforestry and a key partner in The Ebony Project

SOME MUSICAL
BREAKTHROUGHS
HAPPEN IN STUDIOS.
SOME IN GARAGES.
And some in forests.

ON A DUSTY ROAD OUTSIDE YAOUNDÉ, CAMEROON, YOU CAN PEER INTO THE AFRICAN FOREST AND SEE SOMETHING TOTALLY OUT OF PLACE: VILLAGERS PLANTING EBONY SAPLINGS. ALL SUPPORTED BY A GUITAR MANUFACTURER FROM EL CAJON, CALIFORNIA. DESPITE THE FACT THAT EBONY HAS BEEN USED IN GUITAR AND VIOLIN FINGERBOARDS FOR CENTURIES, THE MUSIC INDUSTRY HAD DONE VERY LITTLE TO REPLANT IT. SINCE WE HAVE NO DESIRE TO EVER MAKE GUITARS WITHOUT EBONY, WE TEAMED UP WITH SOME OF THE WORLD'S BEST RESEARCHERS AND FORESTERS TO STUDY HOW TO REPLANT IT ON A LARGE SCALE. NOW, FOR THE FIRST TIME IN HISTORY, WE'RE PLANTING, GROWING, AND HARVESTING EBONY SUSTAINABLY. ONE LOOK INTO THAT FOREST IN CAMEROON REVEALS SOMETHING ELSE SPROUTING: HOPE. NOT JUST FOR EBONY, BUT FOR THE FUTURE OF TONEWOODS WORLDWIDE. WATCH THE WHOLE STORY *at taylorguitars.com/ebonyproject.*

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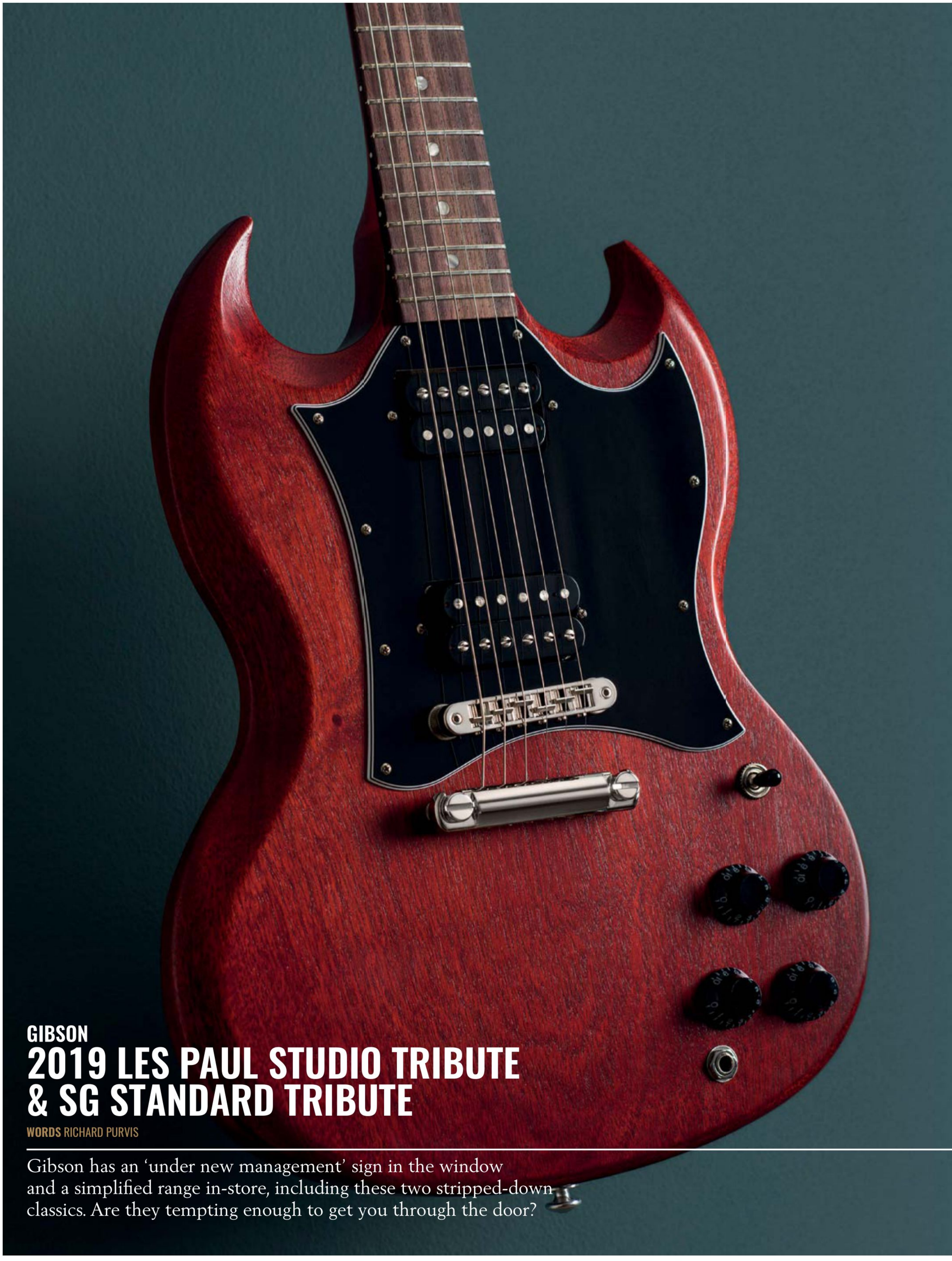
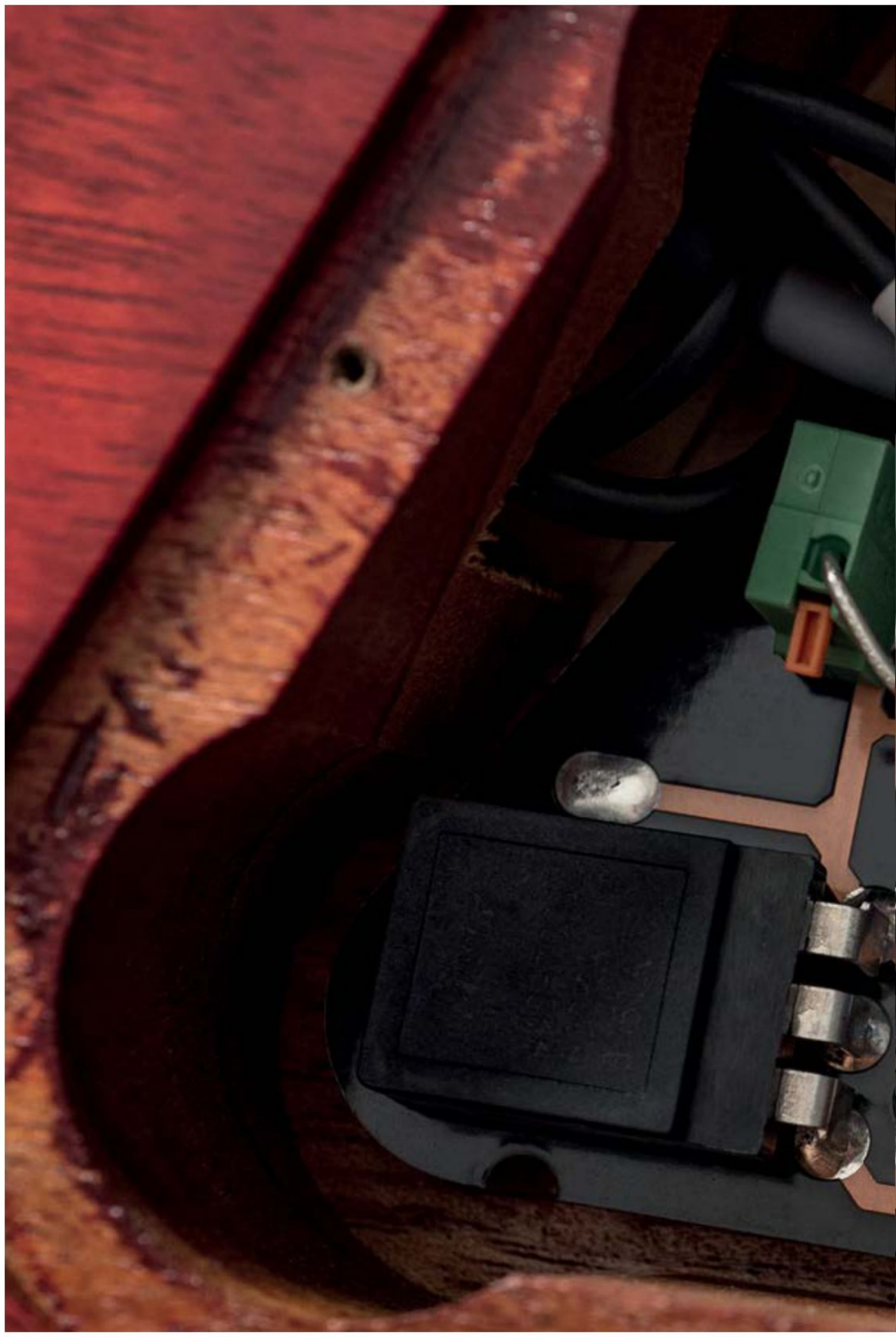


GIBSON

2019 LES PAUL STUDIO TRIBUTE & SG STANDARD TRIBUTE

WORDS RICHARD PURVIS

Gibson has an ‘under new management’ sign in the window and a simplified range in-store, including these two stripped-down classics. Are they tempting enough to get you through the door?



We probably don't need to remind you that Gibson has been through a period of turbulence in recent years. But amid all the cashflow crises and management shake-ups, this is still a guitar maker – and, lest we forget, a rather good one. So, while 2019 looks like being a crucial year in the boardroom as the company plots its path out of troubled financial waters, it's arguably even more important than ever that the instruments coming out of the Nashville factory are reassuringly well crafted.

There's a distinct whiff of 'back to basics' about the 2019 range. You're given a few fancy colour options to consider, but the number of models to choose from has been slashed – just eight Les Pauls instead of the bewildering 46 of the 2018 catalogue, for example – and the divisive robot tuners are nowhere to be seen.

The guitars we're testing today are in that all-important sub-£1,000 zone, where grown-up tone is still required, but frills are not. So that means no glossy finishes, no neck binding or block markers and no swanky pickups – hence both these instruments are fitted with Gibson's trusty old 490 humbuckers. But you do get the classic combination of mahogany and rosewood construction, with one twist: the necks, like the Les Paul's top, are maple.

That might mean a touch of added brightness as well as some extra weight in the left hand; what it certainly means is that the backs of both necks and headstocks have a pinkish pallor that's not so much vintage port as over-diluted cranberry juice. But the satin nitro finish on both bodies is pleasant enough, and we're struggling to find any obvious flaws.

This SG looks a lot like the old Special Faded model, and in fact, it's pretty much identical in specifications aside from the maple neck. The profile of that neck is listed as 'rounded', but it's not too much of a handful on our review guitar and this is no more unbalanced on a strap than the average SG. The strap buttons are chunky, too. There are other (more expensive) options for those who insist on covered pickups and a small pickguard, but the SG Special Faded was a fine workhorse for a long time and we won't complain if this turns out to be no more than a tweak to that formula.

The other guitar is hardly more radical: finish aside, it's a close cousin to the equally reliable Les Paul Studio. The neck is a touch slimmer than the SG's, and 'ultra modern' weight-relief chambering means it isn't that much heavier, although it still feels very much like a Les Paul. This reddish sunburst is Iced Tea; there's also a darker Tobacco Burst option.

You may have noticed that neither guitar has a rhythm/treble ring around its pickup switch. Outraged by this unforgivable omission? Hold off on that letter to your MP – you'll find your optional poker chip in the case. And that brings us to one final detail that really needs mentioning: you don't get a hard shell at this price point, but these are about the chunkiest, stiffest soft cases we've ever seen. Combine that with the extra toughness of the maple necks, and these

instruments should be practically drop-proof. A cure at last for the dreaded curse of the broken headstock? Maybe things really are looking up for Gibson…

IN USE

All the 2019 models ship with hybrid 0.09-0.46 strings, which can feel a teeny bit flappy on a Gibson scale length if you're used to 10s, but we have no issues to report with setup or frets. And the acoustic voices of these two guitars, while strikingly different, are both equally promising. Ever doubted how much of an effect the construction differences between a Les Paul and an SG really have on tone? We've a great opportunity here to compare two instruments that are virtually identical in every other respect.

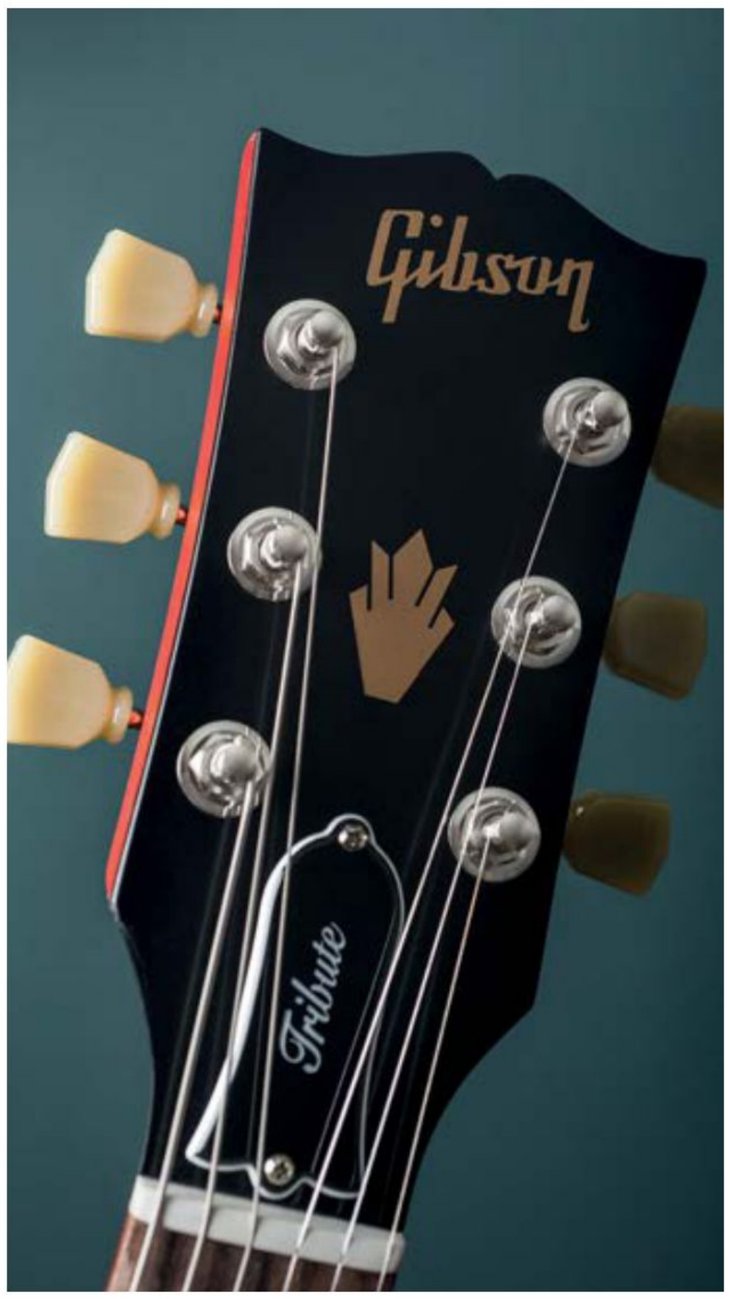
Unplugged, the SG sounds full enough, but is very much focused on brassy, strident mids; the weightier Les Paul has a much softer response, with a more rounded bottom end, though all that maple keeps it nice and breezy at the top. We'll plug the

latter in first, as it's definitely what Lester would have wanted.

The 490s are meant to be broadly PAF-like but wound a little hotter, and that's precisely what we get here. Don't expect the silky sophistication of a high-end reissue, but this is a fine, rocking Les Paul by any standards: snappy on the bridge pickup, woody on the neck, and with a pleasing twinkle in the middle position. Feed it some overdrive and there's no shortage of creamy sustain, while the maple top and neck ensure a crisp edge to every note.

Bring those matching electronics into the equation, and the SG suddenly doesn't sound quite so different as it did acoustically: this isn't a stranger to the Les Paul, just a cheeky kid brother with a less sensible haircut. It's more raspy on the bridge pickup, with a tighter bass response in all three positions, but that's not to say it can't get surprisingly jazzy in the neck position with the right amp settings. Of the two, this is the guitar we end up grabbing more often, and playing for longer, because it's simply more fun.

Sorry to be predictable, but it's as true as it ever was: when compared directly, the Les Paul is fuller and more mature, while the SG is angrier and more 'alive'. But the real story is what these two guitars have in common: they're both well-made instruments that do exactly what's expected of them, and we'd happily take either of them for that Glasto headline slot (any year now!). In other words, if these Tribute models are anything to go by, then Gibson has still got it. **G**



KEY FEATURES

LES PAUL STUDIO TRIBUTE 2019
PRICE £949 (inc soft case)
DESCRIPTION Solidbody single-cutaway electric guitar. Made in USA
BUILD Chambered mahogany body with maple top, set maple neck, rosewood fingerboard with 12" radius, 22 medium frets, TekToid nut
HARDWARE Aluminium Tune-o-matic bridge and stopbar tailpiece, Vintage Deluxe tuners
ELECTRICS 490T (bridge) and 490R (neck) humbuckers, three-way switch, independent volume and tone controls
SCALE LENGTH 24.75"/628mm
NECK WIDTH 43mm at nut, 52.5mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 22mm at first fret, 22.5mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 36mm at nut, 51mm at bridge
WEIGHT 3.7kg/8.1lbs
FINISHES Satin Iced Tea (as reviewed), Satin Tobacco Burst
LEFT HANDERS Yes, no extra cost

8/10 **A fine, feisty Les Paul for those who don't need all the cosmetic trimmings**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

GIBSON LES PAUL STUDIO **£1,399**, EPIPHONE LES PAUL STANDARD **£369**, HAGSTRÖM SUPER SWEDE **£620**

KEY FEATURES

SG STANDARD TRIBUTE 2019
PRICE £899 (inc soft case)
DESCRIPTION Solidbody double-cutaway electric guitar. Made in USA
BUILD Mahogany body, set maple neck, rosewood fingerboard with 12" radius, 22 medium frets, TekToid nut
HARDWARE Aluminium Tune-o-matic bridge and stopbar tailpiece, Deluxe tuners
ELECTRICS 490T (bridge) and 490R (neck) humbuckers, three-way switch, independent volume and tone controls
SCALE LENGTH 24.75"/628mm
NECK WIDTH 42.5mm at nut, 52.5mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 20.5mm at first fret, 24mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 36mm at nut, 51mm at bridge
WEIGHT 2.9kg/6.4lbs
FINISHES Vintage Cherry Satin (as reviewed), Natural Walnut
LEFT HANDERS Yes, no extra cost
CONTACT Andertons Music
andertons.co.uk gibson.com

9/10 **A no-nonsense SG that sounds a lot more polished than it looks**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

GIBSON SG STANDARD **£1,199**, EPIPHONE LTD ED TONY IOMMI SIGNATURE SG CUSTOM **£749**, GUILD S-100 POLARA **£619**

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Rivolta GUITARS

BY · DENNIS · FANO

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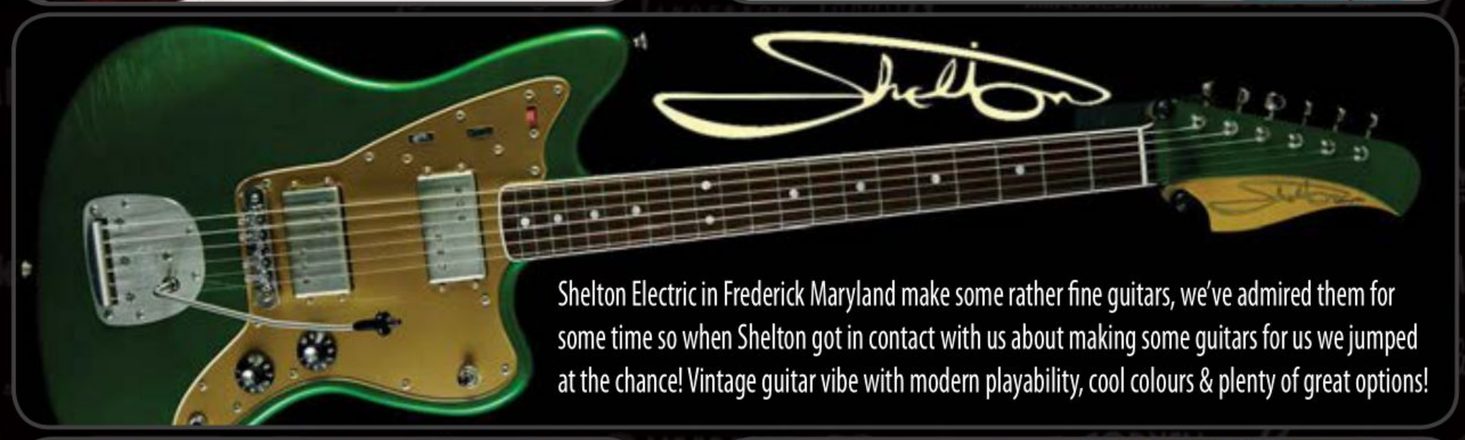

Shelton Electric

Shelton Electric in Frederick Maryland make some rather fine guitars, we've admired them for some time so when Shelton got in contact with us about making some guitars for us we jumped at the chance! Vintage guitar vibe with modern playability, cool colours & plenty of great options!

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Full range of Two Rock Heads, Combos and Cabinets in stock

Two-Rock

Brook guitars

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fano guitars

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Novo GUITARS

BY · DENNIS · FANO

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MAYBACH

LESTER JR DOUBLE CUT SPECIAL

WORDS CHRIS VINNICOMBE

Conceived in Germany and made in the Czech Republic, Maybach's guitars are keenly priced and make no bones about their inspiration. Perhaps this is one European union that won't prove divisive…

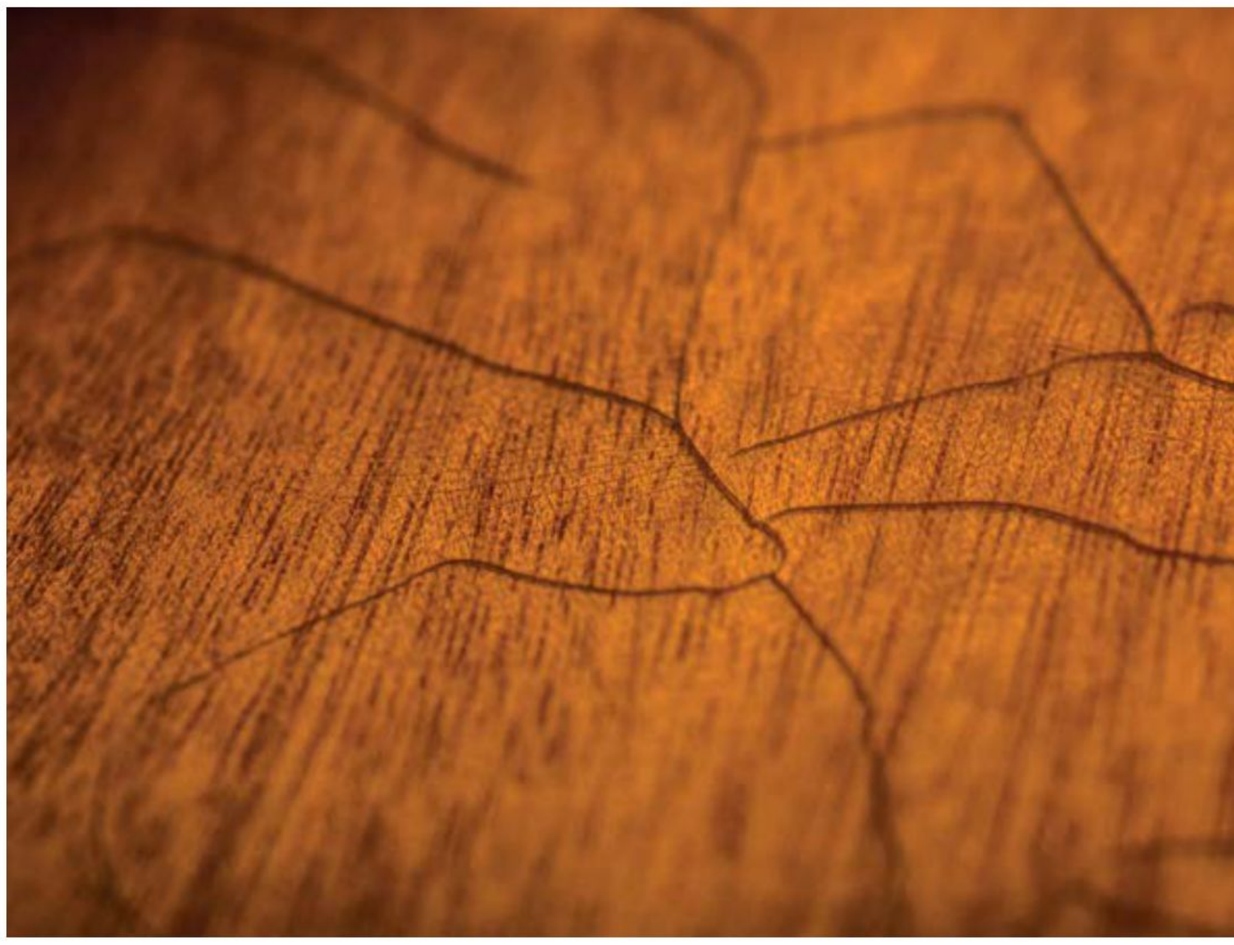
This is our third encounter with a Maybach solidbody in recent times and, like the Albatroz 65-2 and Lester Cherry Lane 58 Aged models, the Lester Jr Double Cut Special is rather heavily influenced by one of Gibson's greatest hits of the Kalamazoo era. Despite having both 'Jr' and 'Special' in its name, this Lester is clearly inspired by the double-cut Les Paul Special, as we now know it, which superseded the single-cutaway model when it was introduced in mid 1958 and then morphed into the SG Special in 1961.

Maybach's Aged TV Yellow and reddish Antique Walnut reflect the finish options that Gibson made available back in '58, while our review model's Aged Vintage Sunburst, single-ply black pickguard and unbound fingerboard bring something of the mid-50s Junior look to the table. There's a 'modded road warrior' vibe here, too, thanks to its biggest deviation from vintage specifications: the Badass-style bridge that combines a wrapover configuration with six individually adjustable saddles.

The general consensus in this office tends to be that, when properly set-up, a 1950s Gibson with a wraptail bridge is a passport to instant tonal gratification rather than the intonation nightmare that some people make them out to be. Sure, if you are playing technical metal or a pop session alongside lots of perfectly in-tune electronic sounds, then a '54 Goldtop might not be your first choice, but for just about any blues/rock/roots gig, a set of vintage P-90s in a lump of mahogany with a wrapover is about as good as it gets.

On whichever side of the great intonation debate you stand, Maybach seems to have it nailed. When strummed acoustically, the Lester has all the resonance, balance and sustain that we'd hope for from this type of design, with the added bonus of chord shapes that mix high-register fretted notes and open strings sounding near perfectly in-tune straight out of the shipping carton. Back down at the cowboy end, that sometimes troublesome first-position C major plays nicely, too.

Another good sign: the Lester is rich and harmonically complex before you even flick your amplifier's power switch. Let a chord ring out unplugged and hold the guitar's body to your ear and you can hear high overtones bloom into something resembling feedback – it's something that always bodes



KEY FEATURES

PRICE £1,735 (inc. hard case)
DESCRIPTION Solidbody double-cutaway electric guitar. Made in Czech Republic
BUILD Two-piece mahogany body, set mahogany neck, 12" radius rosewood fingerboard with 22 medium-jumbo frets
HARDWARE Aged Gotoh SD90 vintage-style tuners, six-saddle wrapover bridge
ELECTRICS 2x Amber P-90 pickups, 2x volume, 2x tone, 3-way toggle pickup-selector switch
SCALE LENGTH 24.75"/628mm
NECK WIDTH 42.8mm at nut, 52.6mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 22.5mm at first fret, 24.4mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 34.5mm at nut, 51.7mm at bridge
WEIGHT 3.34kg/7.38lb
FINISH Aged nitrocellulose. Vintage Sunburst (as reviewed), TV Yellow, Antique Walnut
LEFT HANDERS Yes, 10 per cent upcharge
CONTACT Maybach Guitars
maybach-guitars.de

well for amplified tone. But we're getting ahead of ourselves…

This Czech Republic-manufactured double-cut Lester, like the other Maybachs we've seen in the flesh, is a real looker. The mixture of scuffs, dings, pronounced crazing and finer lacquer-checking lines that are only visible under close inspection appears nicely random and isn't overdone. The plastics and hardware are lightly aged, too, and the only area that looks pristine is the Indian rosewood fretboard. It's a rich and attractive slab which, like the lightweight and resonant mahogany neck and body, suggests that Maybach is choosing its timber wisely.

From an aesthetic perspective, LP-inspired guitars so often fall down at the peghead when attempts to stay out of legal hot water result in a jarring redesign. There are no such troubles here – visual balance is maintained by the fact that German parent company iMusicnetwork also owns Larson Bros and has borrowed the acoustic brand's elegant take on the open-book headstock outline for its Lester series electrics.

IN USE

We've already remarked upon the Lester's impressive acoustic performance and it's no slouch in the feel and playability stakes, either. The attention paid to the fingerboard edges and fret ends means that travel up and

down the neck is smooth and unimpeded, while the nicely rounded neck profile has just the right amount of heft without feeling intimidating. Despite the fragile appearance of the neck join, we don't have any issues with unwanted SG-style whip.

One of our stock P-90 tone tests involves dialling in some amp crunch, then rolling the bridge pickup's volume back to around two. If the pickup and controls are working as they should, strum some simple chords and your P-90-loaded Les Paul should be doing a passable impression of a J-160E. The Maybach aces that exam, and sounds pretty raunchy when we crank the guitar's volume control back up and unleash hell. The treble roll-off from the tone controls is a little overcooked but otherwise, down at the bridge, everything you'd want from a guitar like this is present and correct: Keef, Billy Gibbons, New York Dolls, Aerosmith, Green Day and more. Switch over to the neck position and there's no shortage of airy harmonics and sparkling clarity – it can get fat and swampy without losing definition and sounds great for anything from The Black Keys to pseudo-Hendrix tones.

There's a sweetness and elasticity both at the neck and in blended middle-position tones that makes this a much more versatile machine than history often gives LP Specials credit for. Sure, it can snarl, but as you explore the interplay between the pickups and volume controls, so much more light and shade is revealed. The company website states that "if you play a Maybach guitar, you are more interested in quality than in a brand name". That may well be the case, but on this evidence, the Maybach brand is starting to make a name for itself, for all the right reasons. ***G***

9/10 **Competitively priced and versatile, this double-cut could be your secret weapon**

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Fender USA Lonstar Strat - sunburst - used/1996.....£959
Collings i35LC Deluxe - aged faded cherry.....£3,990
Fender Jason Smith Masterbuilt '68' Paisley Strat - used/2014....£4,289
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Fender Custom Shop 68 Relic Strat - aged olympic white £3,349
Gibson Les Paul Deluxe Gold Top - 2011 Limited edition reissue..£1,669
Patrick Eggle Berlin Pro 24V - used/1992 .....£1,099
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Tom Anderson T- Classic - tobacco burst - used/2005.....£1,675

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HERITAGE
H-137 & H-150

WORDS HUW PRICE

Situated in Gibson's original Kalamazoo factory, Heritage keeps the flag flying for handcrafted American guitars, traditional tonewoods and nitrocellulose finishes with two fresh takes on winning formulas…

Although the events were separated by nearly three decades, there are some interesting parallels in the way that Guild and Heritage Guitars came into being. Back in 1952, when Guild was founded, it was staffed by a core of Epiphone employees who didn't want to relocate from Queens to Philadelphia. Similarly, many experienced luthiers at the 225 Parsons Street factory in Kalamazoo, Michigan were reluctant to head south with Gibson when it moved production to Nashville, Tennessee. In 1985, a group of employees rented space at the old Gibson factory and formed Heritage to manufacture Gibson-style guitars, retaining many of the of the old tools and production methods.

The company pressed ahead with a small range of single-cutaway, semi-hollow and jazzbox-style models. And, as with Guild, some now hold Heritage in higher esteem than the brand from which it originated.

Fast-forward to the present, and Heritage is still building in Kalamazoo, but shipping to the world via a recent sales and marketing partnership with BandLab Technologies *[Editor's note – BandLab Technologies also owns Guitar.com and Guitar Magazine*].

Like vintage Gibsons, Heritage guitars have a 17-degree headstock angle, but the narrow headstock means the strings follow a straighter path to the Grover tuners. It's worth noting that on both guitars, the 12th fret is 324mm away from the nut. Heritage uses the 50s era 'rule of 18' to calculate the fret positions, rather than the modern 'rule of 17.817', and the resulting scale length is actually 24.6, rather than 24.75, inches.

One-piece mahogany bodies are combined with Indian rosewood and locally sourced figured maple, and nickel-plated hardware is used throughout. Pearl inlays are preferred to celluloid nitrate and Heritage uses nitrocellulose lacquer exclusively, while frets are dressed by the company's in-house Plek machine.

H-137

With its 1.75-inch body of tight-grained mahogany, a set one-piece mahogany neck and an unbound rosewood fingerboard, the H-137 is 'special stuff'. The aluminium wrapover tailpiece has intonation compensation mouldings – optimised for a plain G string – and locking studs to prevent the bridge from tipping forward. A pair of Lollar P-90s combines with a conventional control layout and all-black plastics. Although the neck and back have a natural gloss finish, the front of the body has an amber tint in the centre and tobacco-brown edges form a traditional 'teardrop' burst.

H-150

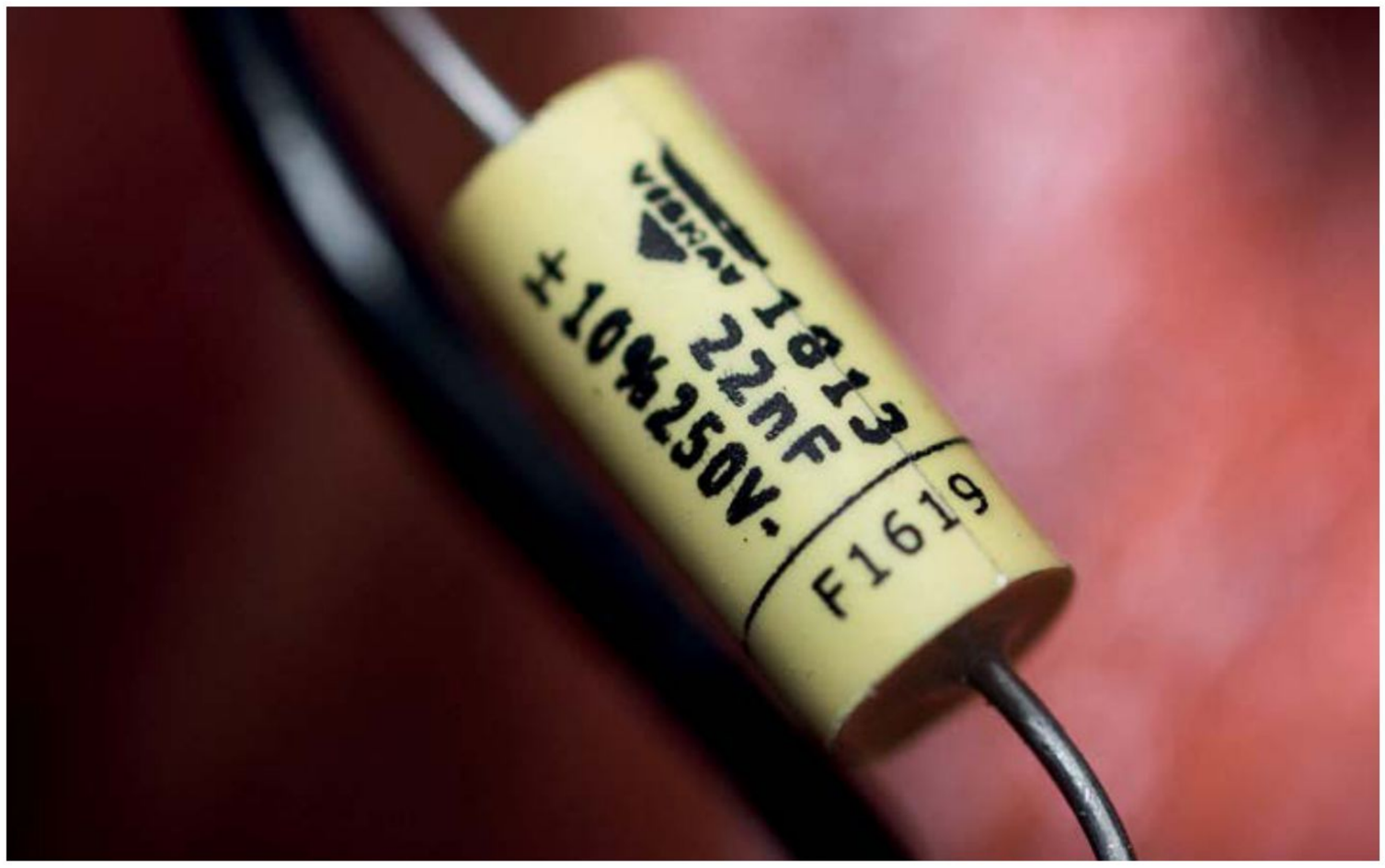
Heritage's mahogany looks resplendent under cherry lacquer and it's a pleasant surprise to see the maple strip under the ABS binding in the cutaway. The H-150's darker rosewood 'board is bound, and the fret nibs are particularly well done. Like many vintage Les Pauls, the maple cap looks quite plain from some angles, but as you twist the body, the flames leap out. This holographic effect indicates old-school finishing techniques, without any stain applied to the maple.

Pickups-wise, this time, we have a pair of Seymour Duncan '59 humbuckers.

IN USE

The H-137 is on the weightier end of the vintage spectrum, but with a medium-depth neck and soft shoulders it's a comfortable guitar to play, despite slight neck heaviness. Acoustically resonant and rich in sustain, the tonal characteristics are bright and airy, with a pingy attack. This natural brightness, however, makes the full-bodied woodiness we associate with this type of guitar harder to discern.

The Lollar P-90s are significantly louder and brighter than the mid-50s set we use for comparison, and the guitar arrives with its bridge pole screws almost touching the strings. This yields an aggressive and articulate rock tone, but we're able to elicit more dynamic and refined results by lowering the screws. Both P-90s offer an enjoyably modern take on the theme, with extra snarl, grunt, and bite – they're not called 'Dogears' for nothing.



While it's also on the heavy side, the H-150's fuller neck profile and the Seymour Duncans combine for a more classic feel and tone. Although they have a strong output, these pickups are also very clear and open: the neck has a rounded woodiness and the bridge has quack as well as bite. Overall, the H-150's tone is more sophisticated and robust than the H-137's and it sustains better, too. You can turn the volume controls right down on either guitar without losing treble or clarity.

The idea that Heritage has merely continued to make classic single-cut and semi models just as they were in the good old days is tinged with romance. Although many aspects can be described as 'old school', numerous stylistic differences and pragmatic updates ensure these guitars are no exercise in rose-tinted nostalgia. Without ticking every vintage box, Heritage gets it spectacularly right where it matters.

With immaculately dressed, low-ish medium-jumbo frets, both guitars have a played-in feel. The controls work like those on 1950s Gibsons – despite not being wired 50s-style – and tuning on both guitars is stable.

We'd be curious to hear them with underwound and unpotted pickups, while some vintage-style tuners might improve balance and liven up the transient response. Minor tweaks to the already likeable neck profiles could make them feel even better. With that in mind, we're aware that the widely respected Edwin Wilson is now working with Heritage. Since he was formerly Gibson's Historic guru and headed up the Custom Shop, we can't wait to see how that's going to pan out.

Some of you may find our review models less vibey than factory aged Gibson reissues and other relic'd single-cut alternatives. But for players who listen with their ears rather than their eyes and buy with their head rather than their heart, these guitars are hard to fault. *G*

KEY FEATURES

H-137
PRICE £1,869 (inc. hard case)
DESCRIPTION Solidbody 6-string electric. Made in the USA
BUILD One-piece mahogany body, set one-piece mahogany neck, 12" radius rosewood fingerboard with pearl dot markers and 22 medium-jumbo frets
HARDWARE Compensated wraparound bridge, die-cast Grover tuners
PICKUPS 2x Lollar Dogear P-90 pickups
CONTROLS 2x volume and 2x tone controls, 3-way switch
SCALE LENGTH 24.6"/625mm
NECK WIDTH 43mm at nut, 52.5mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 19.5mm at first fret, 21.5mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 36.2mm at nut, 51.7mm at bridge
WEIGHT 3.9kg/8.5lb
LEFT HANDERS No
FINISHES Original Sunburst (as reviewed), TV Yellow

8/10 **A no-frills solidbody with easy playability, high output and a rock 'n' roll attitude**

KEY FEATURES

H-150
PRICE £2,459 (inc. hard case)
DESCRIPTION Solidbody 6-string electric. Made in the USA
BUILD One-piece mahogany body with flame-maple cap, set one-piece mahogany neck, 12" radius bound rosewood fingerboard with pearl trapezoid markers and 22 medium-jumbo frets
HARDWARE Die-cast Grover tuners, tune-o-matic bridge and locking stop-bar tailpiece
SCALE LENGTH 24.6"/625mm
NECK WIDTH 42.5mm at nut, 52.5mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 22mm at first fret, 23mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 35.4mm at nut, 50.3mm at bridge
WEIGHT 4.2kg/9.2lb
PICKUPS 2x Seymour Duncan '59 covered humbucking pickups
CONTROLS 2x volume and 2x tone controls, 3-way switch
LEFT HANDERS No
FINISHES Vintage Cherry Sunburst (as reviewed), Original Sunburst, Dirty Lemon Burst, Ebony
CONTACT Westside Distribution
westsidedistribution.com, heritageguitars.com

8/10 **More in common with modern than vintage LPs but the tone, feel and build impress**

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JENNINGS GUITARS

CATALINA & VOYAGER DELUXE

WORDS CHRIS VINNICOMBE

Do these cool thinline offsets from California have the substance to match their boutique stylings?

Jennings
Catalina

Based in Camarillo, about 13 miles inland from the beaches of Oxnard in Southern California, Jennings Guitars was officially established in December 2014 by owner/founder Chad Jennings and co-founder Devin Murdoch. Chad's career in luthiery began at the age of 14 when he built a guitar for an eighth-grade science-fair project, while Devin spent his high-school years building skateboards by laminating various strips of timber and shaping the resulting planks into decks.

Jennings instruments are available in the UK via James' Home Of Tone in Stourbridge in the West Midlands. We've been consistently impressed by the selection of boutique brands that Home Of Tone's eponymous head honcho James Gascoigne has carefully curated over the last few years, and in a climate where simply having a good Instagram game makes it possible for anyone to look the part, a trusted set of eyes and ears is invaluable.

Jennings Guitars does, of course, have a good Instagram game, but Chad and Devin clearly know a thing or three about building a good electric guitar as well, as our pair of review instruments proves. Joined in the Jennings range by the T-style Navigator and solidbody Voyager, the Voyager Deluxe and Catalina are offset thinline designs available in a variety of configurations.

Both semi-hollow designs with alder bodies and centre-blocks, the Voyager Deluxe is the more offset of the pair, with an outline reminiscent of a Jazzmaster with more of a Mustang-like shape to its horns. The Catalina has a more rounded and symmetrical lower bout inspired by larger semi-acoustic instruments, and sports two slash-shaped, bound f-holes to the Voyager Deluxe's one.

The Catalina's black nitrocellulose finish is actually a subtle metallic, while the Voyager Deluxe features what the spec sheet describes as a 'mid/light' mahogany stain. In combination with the matching accent on the stepped headstock and the red tortoiseshell Decoboom pickguard, it lends the Voyager Deluxe more of an organic vibe and visually, it's our favourite of the two. We've seen stepped headstock designs before, of course – Fano, Suhr and Shelton are a few brands that spring to mind – but it's particularly well executed here, with the company's retro logo transferred onto a slice of stained alder on the Voyager Deluxe and exposed maple on the Catalina's otherwise black-finished peghead.

On both instruments, the nitro has been sprayed and buffed expertly to a high-gloss sheen. We've become so used to playing and reviewing factory-aged guitars these days that opening a case and pulling out a boutique electric that hasn't had a set of car keys thrown at it feels like a novelty. That said, the Voyager Deluxe's earthier vibe is only going to look cooler when its eventual owner wears their own story into it. For those who want to accelerate that process, satin and exposed grain finishes are also available to order.

When it comes to electronics, both Jennings models feature simple wiring with high-quality components including pickups

from the respected Canadian winder Tim McNelly, Emerson CTS pots and paper-in-oil tone caps and Switchcraft toggle switches and jack sockets.

On the hardware front, Chad and Devin have opted for Kluson's Contemporary Diecast tuners, which have an understated appearance but provide a smooth and secure tuning experience thanks to their 19:1 ratio. The Catalina sports a tune-o-matic and stoptail combo, while the Voyager is equipped with the increasingly ubiquitous Mastery Offset Bridge and Vibrato – a popular choice among offset fans.

IN USE

Thanks in part to quartersawn, medium-depth bolt-on maple necks with maple and ebony slab fingerboards, both guitars have a lively snap and no shortage of dynamic response. The Catalina's ebony fretboard doesn't have the flawless appearance of the Voyager Deluxe's gloss-finished maple, but even with 12-inch fingerboard radii, the relatively thin fretwire on both guitars

Catalina
Jennings
GUITARS

Jennings

throws some satisfying vintage-style fight into the equation when bending strings. The fretwire certainly helps with clarity, too, but the Jennings' loud, airy and clear acoustic voices aren't thin or lacking in woodiness.

McNelly pickups have impressed us in the past and both sets here have found a happy home in their respective instruments. The Voyager Deluxe has a SparkleTron and a Stagger Swagger (a P-90-inspired pickup with hum-cancelling coils) in humbucker-sized Filter'Tron covers, while the Catalina has a pair of McNelly's 'Wild Range' reinventions of Seth Lover's early 1970s design.

As you might expect, the Catalina's tone is a little bit Thinline Telecaster and a little bit Starcaster, but there's less fog here than we remember from the Wide Range neck pickup on our long-gone and much-missed 1973 Telecaster Custom. The result is excellent definition and jangle for arpeggios and it also helps keep mush at bay when used with a long chain of stompbox effects. Wind up the gain and the Catalina has a really compelling and expressive voice for soloing that suits Mark Knopfler-esque fingerstyle lead work as well as it does indie and Americana chords.

It's Voyager by name, Voyager by nature as the vibrato-equipped Jennings offers a more thrilling ride than the Catalina. Where the Catalina's controls offer a range of variations on a theme, the Stagger Swagger and SparkleTron's voices are more distinct. Clarity is again the overriding theme in the neck position, but down at the bridge, there's real drama.

The SparkleTron is one of our absolute favourite Filter'Tron-inspired pickups and here, we fall in love with it all over again. Somehow clear and harmonically complex at the same time, it's a glorious sound that growls, chimes and inspires in equal measure. It's impossible to resist cranking up the spring reverb and reaching for that Mastery Vibrato arm… then, all of a sudden, white horses are crashing all around you and you are in serious danger of being swept away. Surf odyssey, anyone? ***G***

KEY FEATURES

JENNINGS GUITARS CATALINA
PRICE £2,650 (inc. hard case)
DESCRIPTION Semi-hollow double-cutaway electric guitar. Made in USA
BUILD Alder body, maple neck, 12"-radius ebony slab fingerboard with 21 frets
HARDWARE Tune-o-matic bridge, stop tailpiece, Kluson Contemporary Diecast tuners, custom-made pearloid Decoboom pickguard
ELECTRICS 2x McNelly Wild Range humbuckers, volume, tone, 3-way pickup selector switch
SCALE LENGTH 25.5"/648mm
NECK WIDTH 42.7mm at nut, 51.1mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 22.4mm first fret, 23.5mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 35.1mm at nut, 50.3mm at bridge
WEIGHT 3.14kg/6.94lb
FINISH Metallic Black gloss nitrocellulose

8/10 **A sophisticated blend of smoothness and clarity from this stylish thinline offset**

KEY FEATURES

JENNINGS GUITARS VOYAGER DELUXE
PRICE £2,999 (inc. hard case)
DESCRIPTION Semi-hollow double cutaway electric guitar. Made in USA
BUILD Alder body, maple neck, 12" radius maple slab fingerboard with 21 frets
HARDWARE Mastery Bridge and Vibrato, Kluson Contemporary Diecast tuners, custom-made tortoiseshell Decoboom pickguard
ELECTRICS McNelly Stagger Swagger (neck) and Sparkletron (bridge) pickups, volume, tone, 3-way pickup selector switch
SCALE LENGTH 25.5"/648mm
NECK WIDTH 42.5mm at nut, 50.5mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 22.7mm at first fret, 23.8mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 35mm at nut, 51.9mm at bridge
WEIGHT 3.15kg/6.96lb
FINISH Mahogany Stain gloss nitrocellulose
CONTACT James' Home Of Tone
homeoftone.co.uk, jenningsguitars.com

9/10 **Hip surf-rockers and indie noiseniks, start saving – this is your next guitar**

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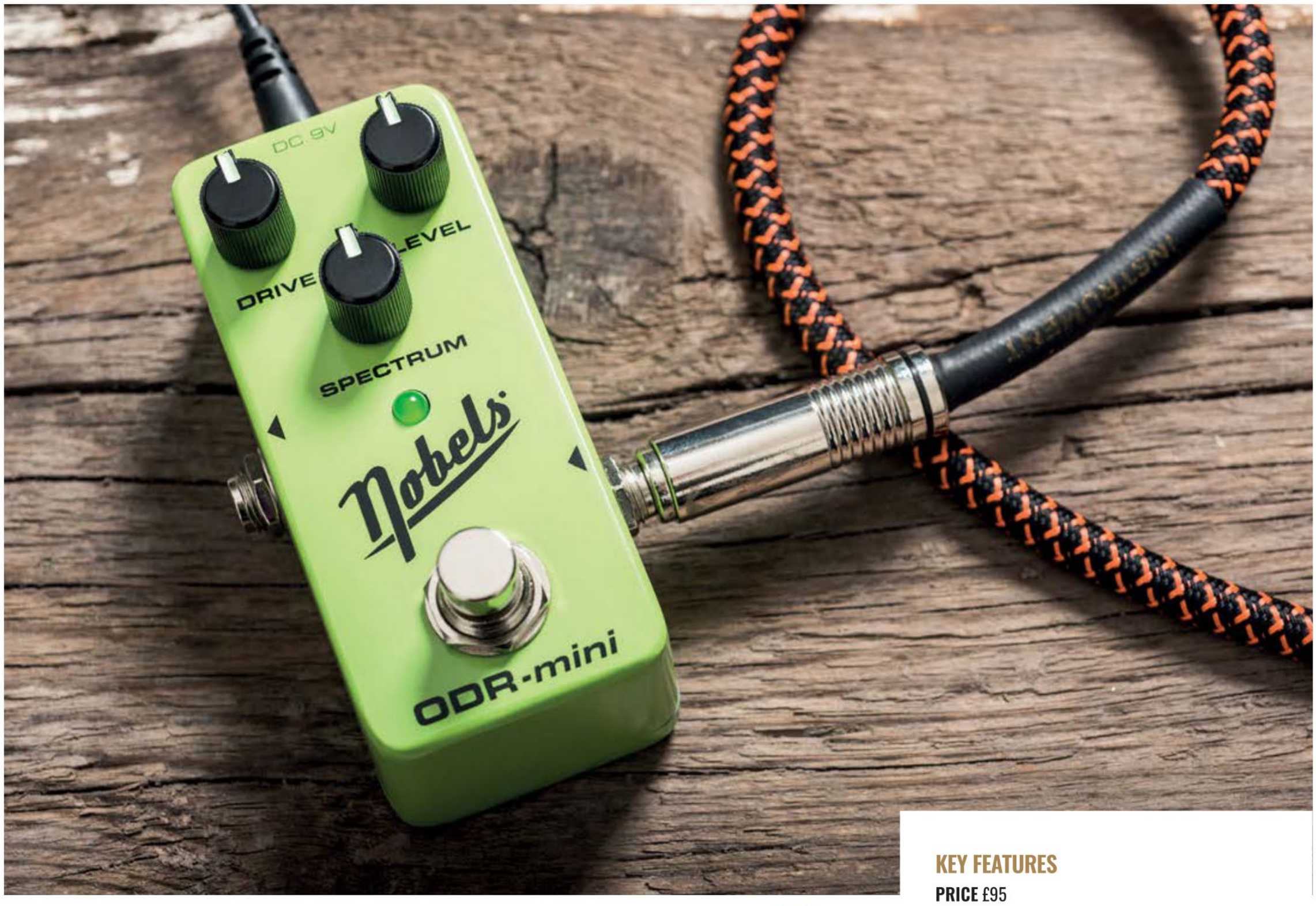

NOBELS

ODR-MINI

WORDS RICHARD PURVIS

Guitar.com EDITOR'S CHOICE

The Nobels ODR-1 might be the most famous overdrive you've never heard of – and now it's gone mini

Despite appearances, this is not a green overdrive pedal. Well, it clearly is – but anyone who translates that as 'yet another wannabe Tube Screamer' is in for a surprise. Nobels has been making the ODR-1 since 1985, when Tube Screamers were around, but the only thing most people associated with the colour green was a frog called Kermit.

Designed in Germany, the original ODR-1 is known for its warm and natural drive, with a wide gain range and none of the bass roll-off or upper-mid pushiness of a Tube Screamer-type overdrive. But it's always been more of a secret weapon for session players than an all-round object of desire – so can this new titchy version help Nobels go mainstream?

IN USE

With drive at 10 o'clock, the ODR-mini growls into life with a sweet-sounding low-gain tone. There's a fair amount of compression involved, giving it the soft-edged feel of a TS9 or a Boss SD-1 – but, crucially, without the same coloration of tone. If anything, in fact, the low end here has a tendency towards chubbiness.

As promised, the drive dial takes us all the way from mild crunch to roaring hard rock… with a little help from that intriguingly named Spectrum control. This is supposed to be more flexible than a standard tone knob – and while we can't quite get our heads around what it's actually doing, it certainly works. Increasing it adds brightness and gain without harshness, while dialling it back softens the top end for darker, more subdued textures. We can definitely conclude that this thing is smarter than the average green overdrive. **G**

9/10 **A neat hybrid of fluffy 80s-style drive and modern transparent crunch**

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £95
DESCRIPTION Overdrive pedal. Made in China
CONTROLS Drive, level, spectrum (tone)
FEATURES True bypass; powered by 9-volt mains supply only (not included)
DIMENSIONS 93 x 53 x 48mm
CONTACT Nobels
nobels.de

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KEY FEATURES

PRICE £189
DESCRIPTION Acoustic-guitar case
FEATURES 1"-thick shock-absorbing 'Flexoskeleton', palm-contoured handle, reinforced neck brace, rubberised foam headstock grip, 'Ballistic Quadraweave' exterior, adjustable endpin protection pads, laptop/tablet-compatible multipocket, knurled abrasion grid on top and bottom
CONTACT reunionblues.com

REUNION BLUES
CONTINENTAL VOYAGER

WORDS CHRIS EATON

Guitar.com EDITOR'S CHOICE

Tired of shouldering flimsy gigbags or manoeuvring unwieldy hard cases? This high-tech solution combines convenience and durability…

Reunion Blues is a California-based company that's been producing high-quality gigbags since the 1970s. The Continental Voyager series is one of several variations, imported into the UK by Dynamic Music Distribution. The item under review here is a dreadnought-size acoustic gig bag – the Reunion Blues range accommodates instruments of many different sizes (small body, dreadnought, classical etc). Our Continental Voyager has been road-tested for a few months before writing this review, housing a large-body resonator guitar. Resonators are notorious for developing rattles, so a strong case is a must. The level of protection offered is superb: the company infamously dropped one of these bags from a rooftop as part of its PR campaign, with the guitar remaining unhurt. This must be down to the high-tech-sounding materials, including an impact-resistant 'Flexoskeleton' design and an outer layer made of Quadraweave, which is designed to weather well.

On the inside, there's a neck block which prevents the guitar from shifting around, and at the bottom are movable pads to stop the strap button taking any impact. It's got plenty of pocket space for accessories, yet the standout feature is the 'Zero G' handle. It's very spongy to hold and extremely comfortable. There are other carrying options, too: the shoulder straps, which can be zipped away when not required, or the 'subway grip', for moving the bag vertically or pulling it out the back of a tour van easily.

This is a good-looking piece of guitar luggage that will keep your instrument safe very effectively, and it's easy to transport. If it's within your budget, we highly recommend you audition one. *G*

9/10 **Superb protection in a stylish and lightweight case, at a relatively high price**

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Finished in Black. Pau Ferro Fingerboard. Classic Series '60s Single Coil Pickups. Including a Fender Deluxe Hard Case.

Fender Traditional '60s Jazzmaster
Pink Paisley. Made in Japan. Rosewood Fingerboard. Alder Body. Single Coil Pickups. Rhythm & Lead Circuits. Inc Gig Bag.

Gibson LPJ (Rubbed Vintage Burst)
Circa 2013. Mahogany Body with Maple Top. 50s Profile Neck. Rosewood Fingerboard. 490T / 498T Pickups. Inc Hard Case.

Gibson Les Paul BFG
Circa 2007. Barely Finished Guitar Series. P-90 neck pickup & Humbucker Bridge Pickup. With Kill Switch. Hard Case Included.

Gretsch G5622T Electromatic
Finished in Georgia Green. Center Block. Double Cutaway. Rosewood Fingerboard. All Maple Design. Super Hilo'Tron Pickups.

Gretsch G5420TG-FSR
Limited Edition. Electromatic Hollowbody. Finished in Black & Gold. Dual Black Top Filter'Tron Pickups with treble bleed circuit.

Gibson 2010 ES-175 VSB (Figured Top)
Vintage Sunburst. All original. Rosewood Fingerboard. Dual '57 Classic PAF Humbucking Pickups. Wonderful Condition. Original Case.

Gibson ES-195 (Ebony)
Circa 2013. P94 Single Coil Pickups. Hollowbody. Maple Top, Back & Sides. Trini Lopez Headstock. With original Gibson Hardcase.

Gretsch G6120-59 LTV QM LTD
Limited Edition Chet Atkins. Quilted Maple Top. Nitrocellulose Lacquer. Dual TV Jones Pickups. Includes Gretsch Hard Case.

Gretsch Electromatic G5655TG Ltd Ed
Limited Edition. Center Block Junior Shape. Filter'Tron Pickups. Finished in Snow Crest White. Gold Hardware.

Rickenbacker 330 Jetglo
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Fender Musicmaster (Circa '73)
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ECC83WA Tube Amp Doctor - CRYO

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ECC83-S	**40 Pcs**	**£6.90 Each**	**6V6GTS**	**16 Pcs**	**£12.00 Each**
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WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY HUW PRICE

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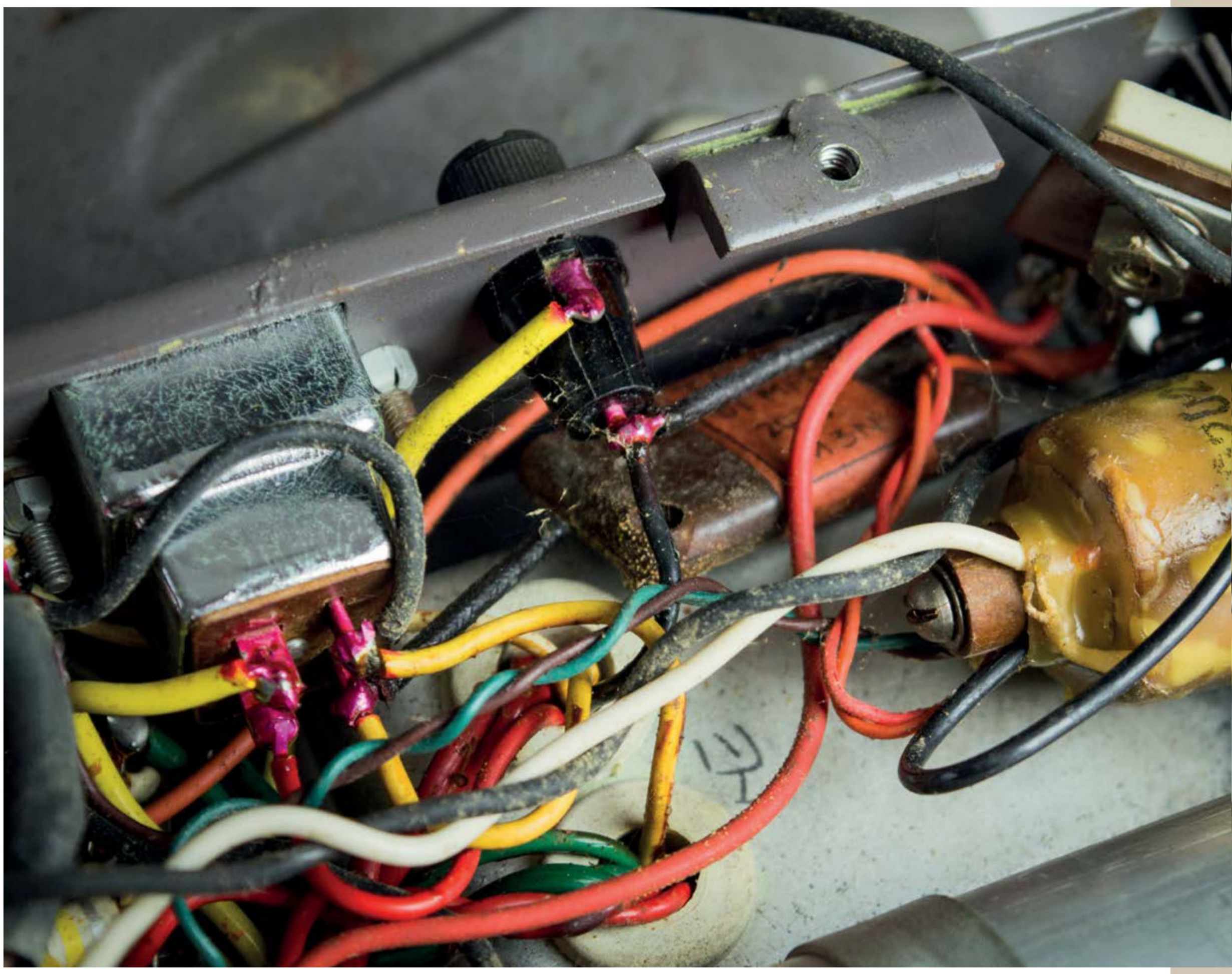


My interest in valve electronics began with hi-fi amps rather than guitar amps and the first was a Leak Stereo 60 that I bought 'as seen' for £25. Barely out of my teens, I was so excited to hear it, I hooked it up to my parent's hi-fi speakers, plonked it on their living room carpet and flicked the power switch.

Almost instantaneously, there was a loud bang, followed by a white mushroom cloud forming over the chassis. With my heart in my mouth, I disconnected the amp from the mains and lifted it off the carpet. Fortunately, the carpet and speakers were undamaged, but there were fragments of oily paper from the exploded capacitor all over the place. The lesson I learned was never to power up an untested valve amp in such a gung-ho way.

So, then, what needs to be done before any long-neglected valve amp can be switched on and used? Some of the information that follows is specific to Filmosounds, but the general principles apply to any untested vintage amp, completed restorations and even newly built amplifiers.

MAIN CONCERN

Due to the absence of an IEC socket, or indeed a flying mains lead with a US plug on the end of it, a bit of modernisation is the first order of business. There is some initial confusion, however, since Filmosounds have four-pin power sockets rather than the usual three-pin sockets. Consulting the circuit diagram doesn't help me, so I turn to Chris Fantana of Rift Amps for advice.

I learn that it's called a Jones socket and that the extra pin allows for the projector lamp voltage to be controlled independently. Chris suggests that the yellow lamp voltage wire connected to pin three of the Jones socket should be disconnected and isolated.

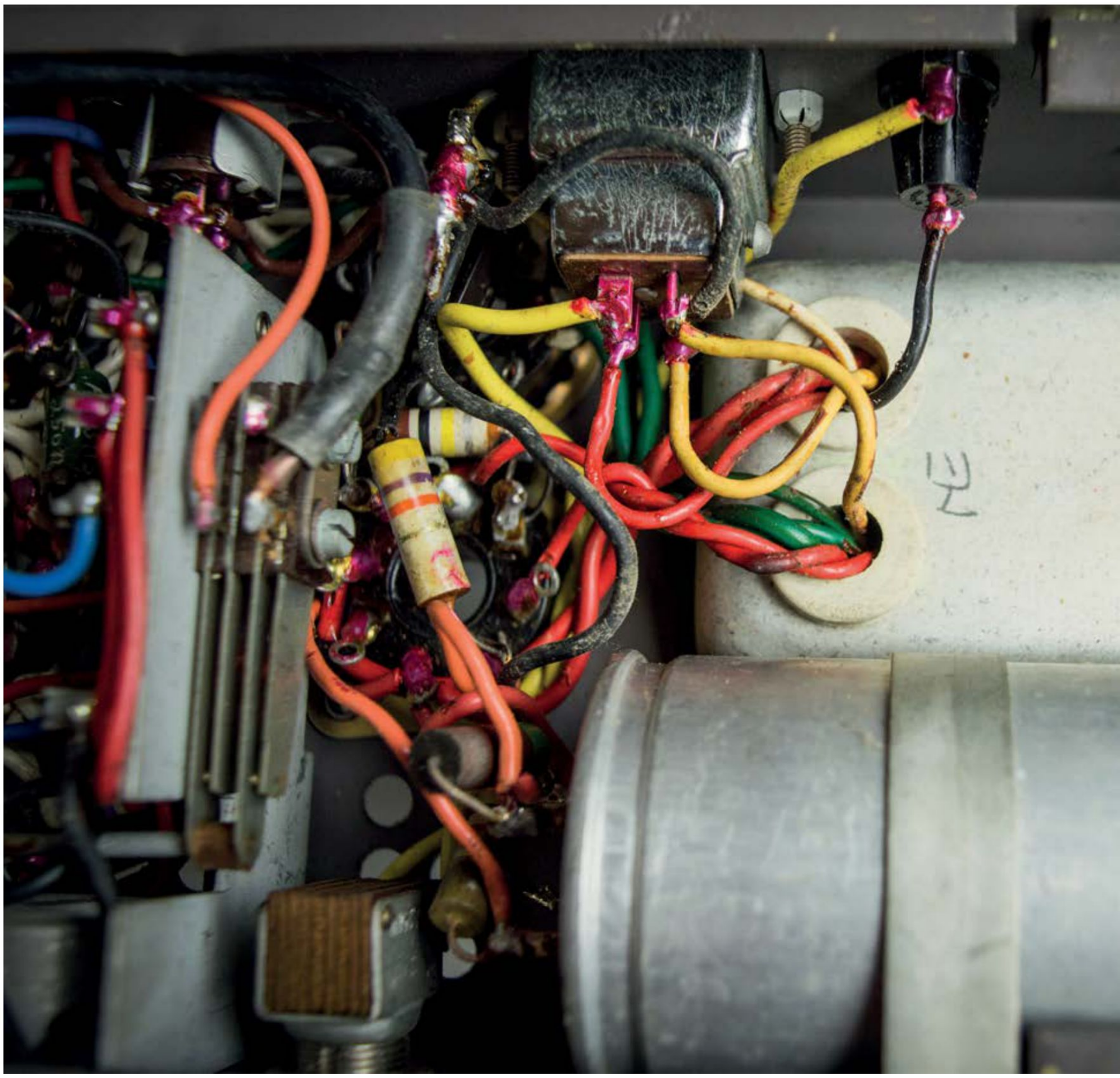
Pin two of the Jones socket is neutral and it connects to the power switch and fuse on its way to the power transformer. There's a large capacitor linking neutral with the lamp voltage wire, and that needs to be removed. Then, to bring things up to IEC60065 safety standards, Chris suggests the power switch and fuse are swapped onto the live side, with a modern IEC socket installed.

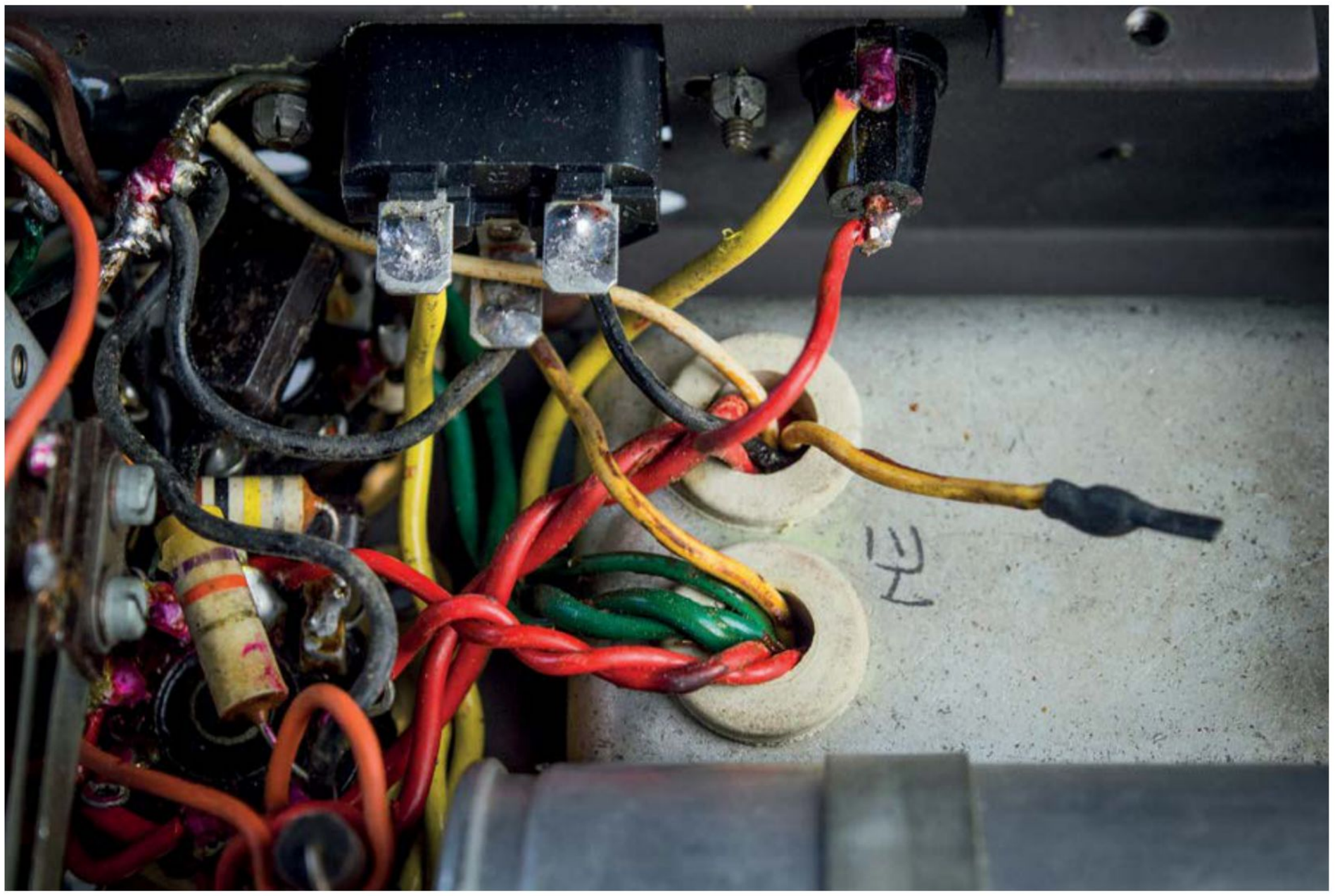
CLEAR OUT

It's becoming obvious why the wiring is described as a 'rat's nest', and things are particularly cluttered around the Jones socket. Since most of this wiring is used for an inductor that would have been used for movie soundtracks rather than external audio input, I decide to strip it out, to ease access to the mains input and power-supply wiring.

Everything comes out easily and I follow Chris' advice on isolating the extra wire before removing the capacitor and the Jones socket. The chassis hole for the Jones socket is an inch square, which is sufficiently tall, but insufficiently wide for a modern IEC socket.

I widen the hole with a file by about 3mm and the IEC socket slots right in. Two new holes are drilled in the chassis to bolt the socket in place and I take care to reinstate the ground pin that was previously secured to the chassis by one of the Jones socket fixing screws. The ground, power switch, fuse and neutral wires are soldered onto the new socket and the mains-wiring update is complete.

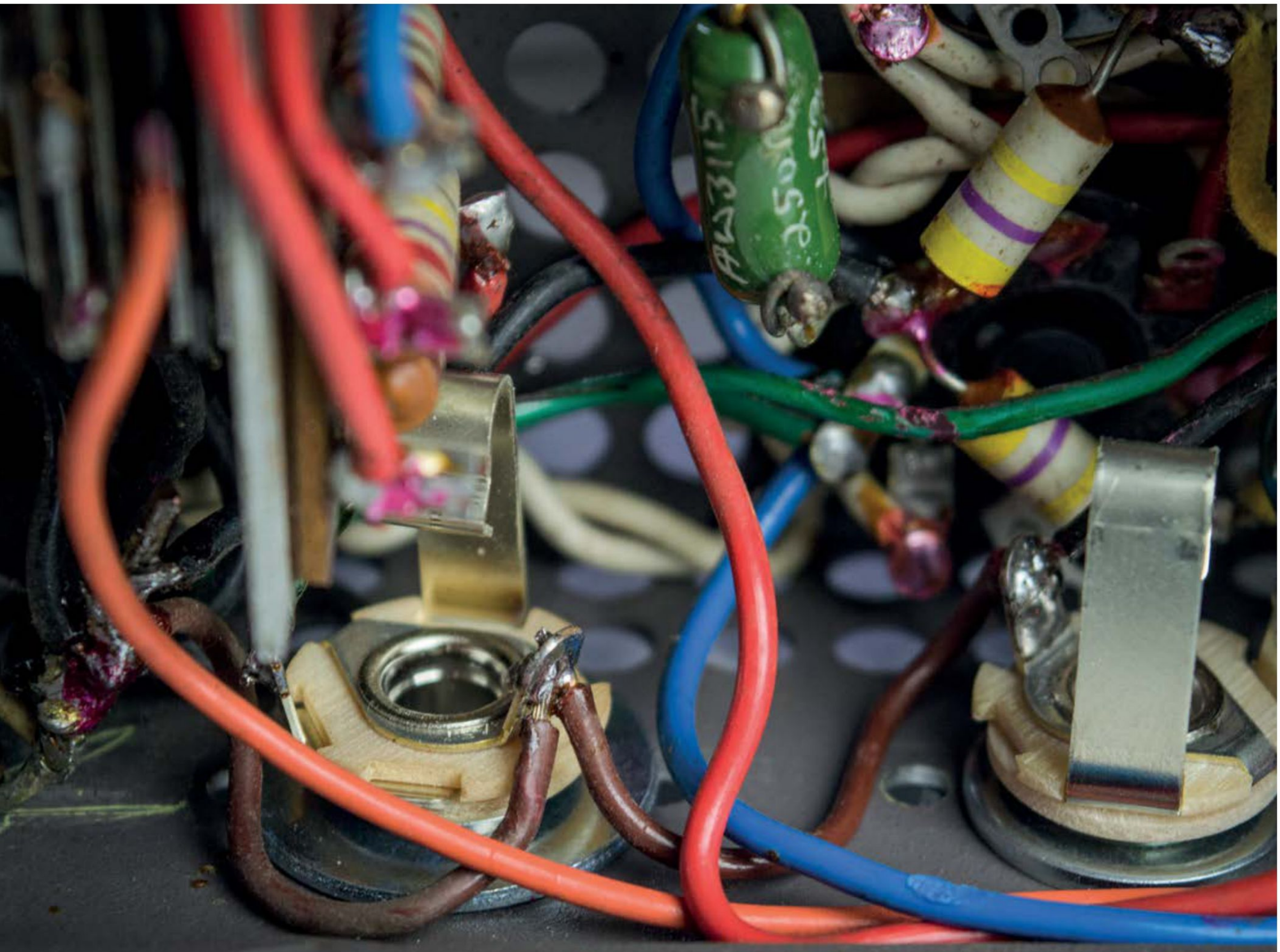




OPPOSITE Filmosounds contain a lot of circuitry that isn't needed for guitar use and this brown capacitor and large inductor can be removed

ABOVE With the surplus components and wiring removed, it's much easier to access the mains wiring and replace the Jones socket

LEFT A new IEC socket has been installed, the switch and fuse have been moved over to the live side and the no-longer-required yellow transformer wire has been isolated



Valve amps cannot be safely powered up without a speaker or dummy load of the correct impedance connected to the output. Since the Filmosound's archaic two-pin sockets will never be practical, I remove them and install regular mono jack sockets instead.

Each of the original sockets is mounted onto the chassis with two brass rivets. Soft brass means it's easy to drill the rivets out and, once all the wires are de-soldered, the sockets are removed to reveal two holes in the chassis.

Unfortunately, the diameter is far too wide for regular jack sockets and washers, so I use a 20mm washer with a 10mm centre hole on the inside and outside of the chassis. With the socket nut tightened, the washers cover the holes and clamp the chassis for a secure fixing. After re-soldering the speaker output wires – along with the negative feedback wire that's attached to the positive tag of the 16-ohm output – attention turns to the transformers.

TRANSFORMER TESTING

There are some tests you can run to determine whether a power transformer is in good enough condition to be connected to mains voltage. The first is a continuity test, with multimeter test wires connected to the live and neutral connectors of the IEC socket.

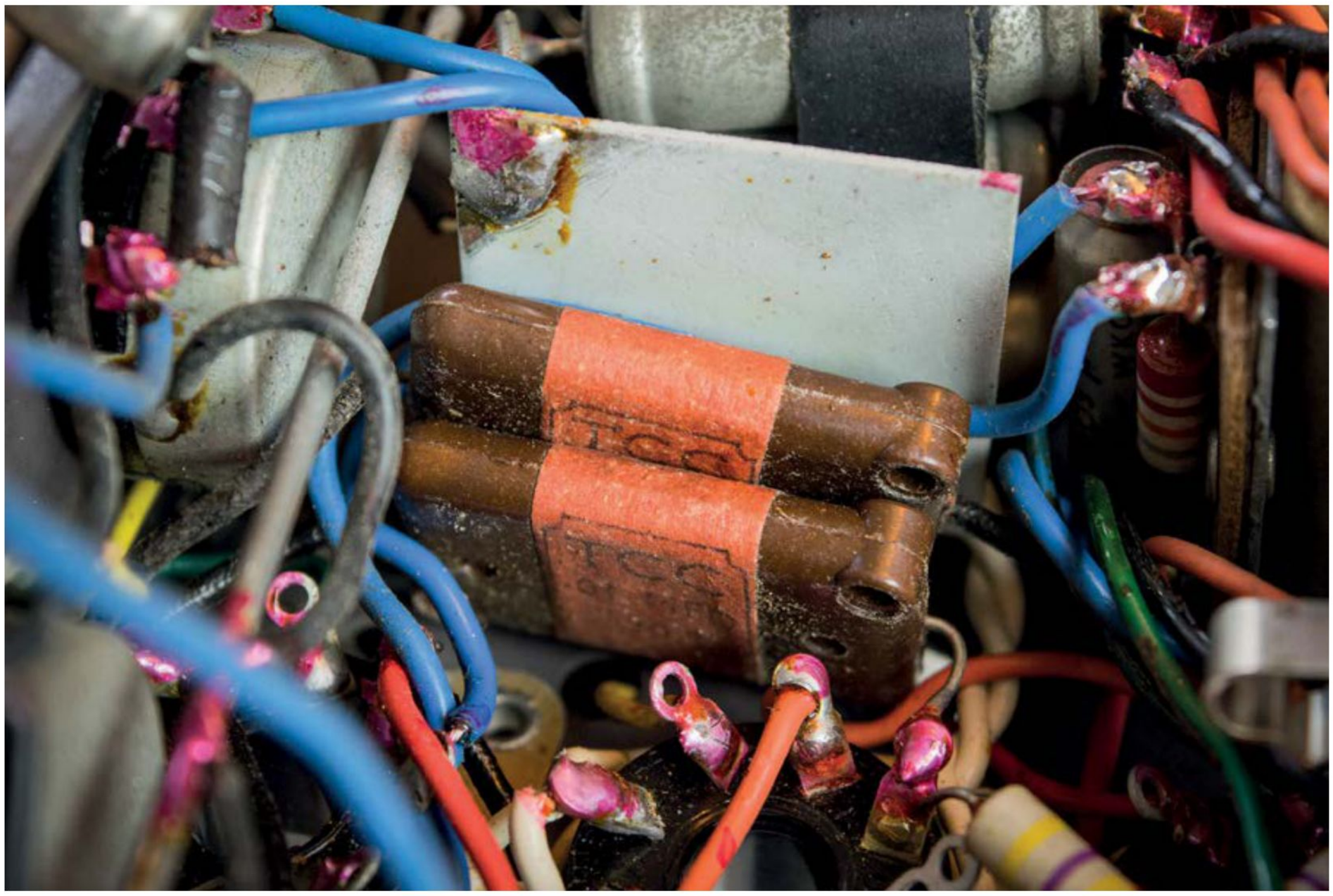
So long as the power switch is in the on position and the fuse is working, you should get a loud beep from your multimeter. If you don't, then check that the fuse and the switch are both okay. My reading fluctuates between 5 and 9 ohms, which confirms the primary is okay, but suggests that the power switch contacts may be oxidised. I install a replacement to fix the issue.

On the secondary side, I measure for resistance between the plate connections on the rectifier tube socket and ground – ie, the centre tap. I also test for resistance across the heater taps and between the rectifier tube's heater taps. When you run these tests, you're looking for very low resistance readings and you should do them with all the valves removed, along with the pilot light bulb, if your amp has one.

On the output transformer's primary side there are three wires, one each for the power tube plates and a centre tap that's connected to the power supply. In this case, the centre tap connects to the junction of the two dropping resistors that are soldered to the big multi stage filter capacitor, while pin three on the valve sockets corresponds to the 6V6 plates.

Setting the multimeter for its lowest resistance range and measuring between the centre tap and each of the plate wires, I read 239 ohms and 219 ohms. The transformer isn't perfectly balanced, but it's close enough. I also measure for resistance between the two wires of the secondary coil and ground. This time I read 4 ohms on the 16-ohm output and 3.7 ohms on the 8-ohm output. Next, I connect the test leads to one of the secondary wires and the primary centre tap, and ramp up through the multimeter's various resistance ranges. Even at the highest setting, you should get no resistance reading at all.

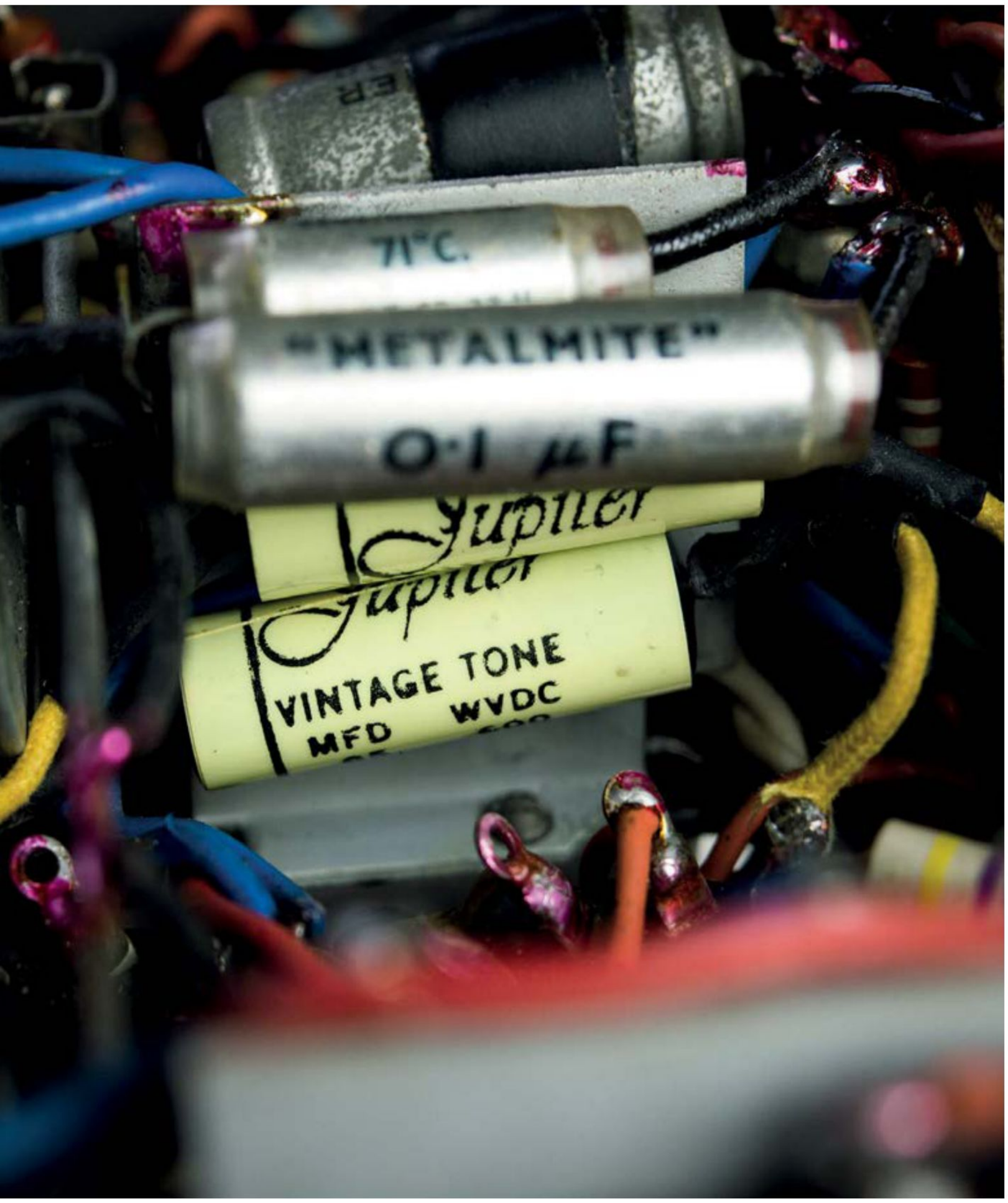
If any of these transformer tests produces unexpected results, the transformer should be sent to a specialist to be checked over and repaired before you power up the amp. Attempting to use a failing output transformer



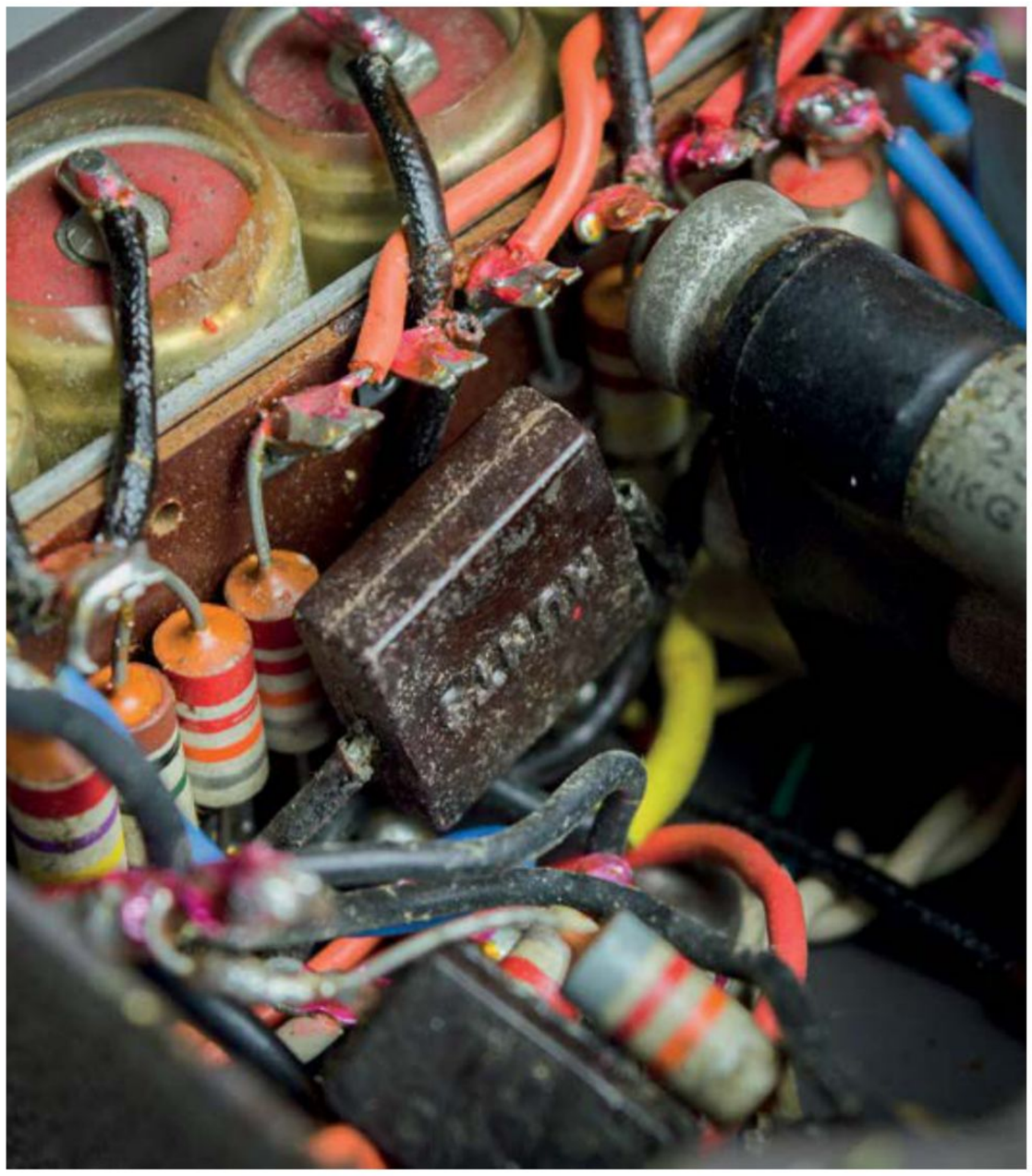
OPPOSITE A pair of quarter-inch jack sockets replace the original two-pin speaker sockets and the green 250-ohm cathode-bias resistor can be seen in the background

ABOVE The new speaker sockets will need to be labelled for 8 and 16 ohms and the IEC socket squeezes in between the 110V voltage label and fuse socket

LEFT A red blush on one of the 6V6s indicates that a coupling capacitor may be leaking and both these mica types will be replaced



ABOVE These silver capacitors in the tone circuit had to be temporarily removed for a pair of Jupiter caps to be installed



RIGHT The chocolate-coloured Hunts capacitor in the preamp will be replaced as a precaution

can potentially send HT voltage to your speaker and you'll end up paying for a speaker repair as well as a transformer rewind. Faulty power transformers could cost you a lot more than a speaker repair. None of these transformer tests guarantee that everything will be fine, but they can flag up certain issues and it's always best to glean whatever information you can about transformers before you flip the power switch. On balance, I'd rather discover a transformer is broken by using a multimeter rather than watching an indoor firework display.

CAPPING OFF

With the mains connections updated and made safe, and both the transformers tested, I can soon try powering up the amp. Before I do this, though, I want to check the capacitors. Problems with big multi-stage filter capacitors, such as the Filmosound's, are often visible. Look for blistering and evidence of electrolyte fluid having leaked out. If you see either, the capacitor should be replaced before powering up. I also use a capacitance tester, which measures the actual capacitance value and gives an ESR (equivalent series resistance) reading to determine if the capacitor is leaky. The device tests at low voltage, so it can only identify capacitors that have completely failed, rather than those that are beginning to fail. Ideally, capacitors are tested with one leg detached from the circuit, but that isn't always possible.

Here, the advantage of having two identical amps pays off. In the amp I'm working on, the 6V6 cathode-bias bypass capacitor reads leaky, but the same capacitor in the other amp reads just fine. The reason is that the bypass capacitor is wired in parallel with a 250-ohm resistor, which is sufficiently low for the meter to see it as a leaky capacitor.

I detach the positive wires from the capacitor to test again. Once properly out of circuit, the capacitor appears to be fine, so I reconnect the wires. The reason the capacitor reads 'good' in the other amp is that the 250-ohm cathode-bias resistor has gone open circuit, so that will have to be changed when the amp is being restored.

POWER STRUGGLES

The fuse value is the final thing to check, and it's vitally important – because it's there to protect you and the amplifier. I've already established that there's electrical continuity across the fuseholder, so now I have to check that there's actually a fuse inside and that it's the correct value. It's not unheard of for fuses to be replaced with paper clips, foil wrappers,

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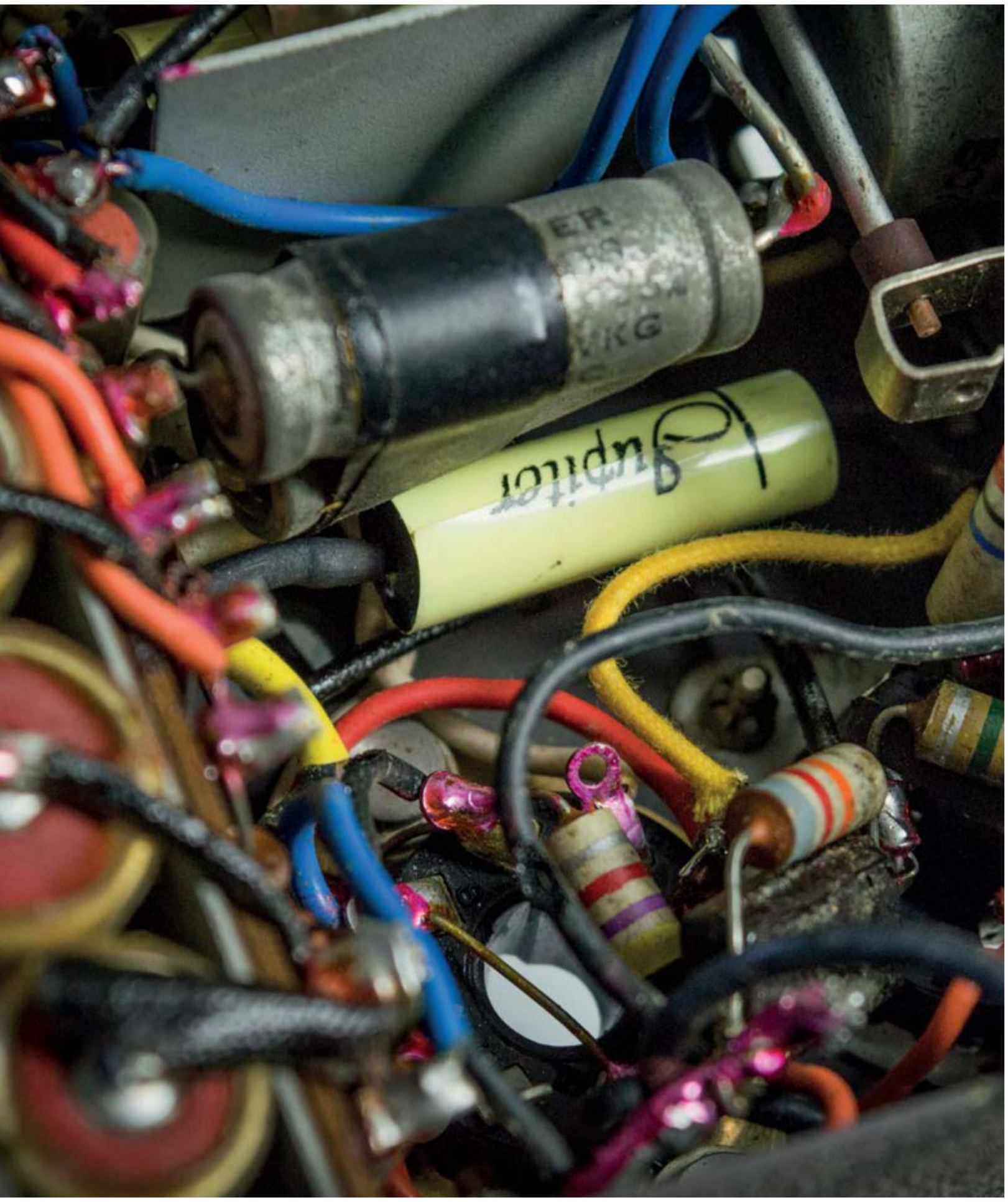

ABOVE Another Jupiter capacitor is used in the preamp and shifted to the side, where there's more space

RIGHT At this stage, relatively few parts have been removed and replaced, because we want to hear how the stock circuit sounds

nails and so forth – all evidence of long-forgotten mods to get faulty amps 'working'. Fuses are rated in amperes and they're designed to blow when an amplifier's current draw becomes excessive. But what exactly is considered 'excessive'?

Most modern amps will have a label next to the fuseholder stating the recommended fuse value. Failing that, you'll find the value in the instruction manual. Although I have a circuit diagram for the 621 Filmosound, the quality is poor and most of the values are illegible. Diagrams for similar-spec US built Filmosounds generally specify a 2A fuse. The one in this amp is 1.5A, so I decide to leave it in there while powering up.

I plug the Filmosound into a 110V step-down transformer, which is connected to a lightbulb current limiter. The amp is connected to an 8-ohm dummy load, first switched on with no valves inserted and then switched off after a few minutes. The process is repeated with the rectifier valve, followed by the power valves one after the other and so on, until the full valve complement is in place.

Throughout the process, I'm looking to see if the lightbulb glows brightly. If it does, it means that something in the amp is drawing excessive current and it should be turned off immediately. All goes well and, with all the valves installed, the lightbulb emits a very dull glow. It's time to connect the amp to a speaker.

SQUEAL-O-SOUND

The Filmosound is working… well, sort of working. It passes signal and the full and clear tone is encouraging, but it's also very noisy and I can see an orange blush inside the 6V6s after the amp has been on for a while. I'm reasonably certain it's being caused by leaky coupling capacitors from the phase inverter.

This is not unexpected, so I replace them and, as a precaution, I replace the capacitor coupling the EF37A plate to the scratchy and noisy volume control. The blushing and scratchy volume-pot issues are remedied and with the volume right down, the amp produces barely any background noise.

That changes as volume is increased, so I'm fairly confident that the filter caps are okay and the noise originates in the input stage. The amp also begins squealing quite abruptly as the volume control approaches maximum.

Research indicates these things are all part of the Filmosound repurposing experience and I'll address the issues in the next instalment before getting into some further modificiations and upgrades. ***G***

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Joni Mitchell's use of idiosyncratic tunings is key to her songwriting style

FIGURE 1 DADEAD TUNING

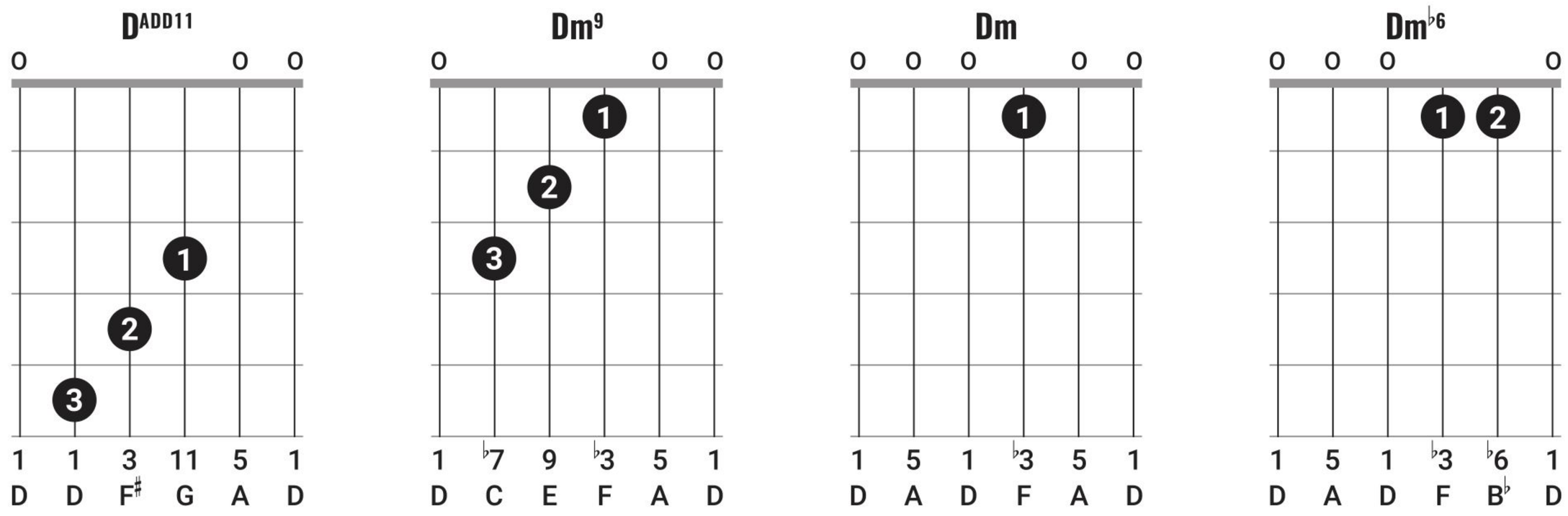
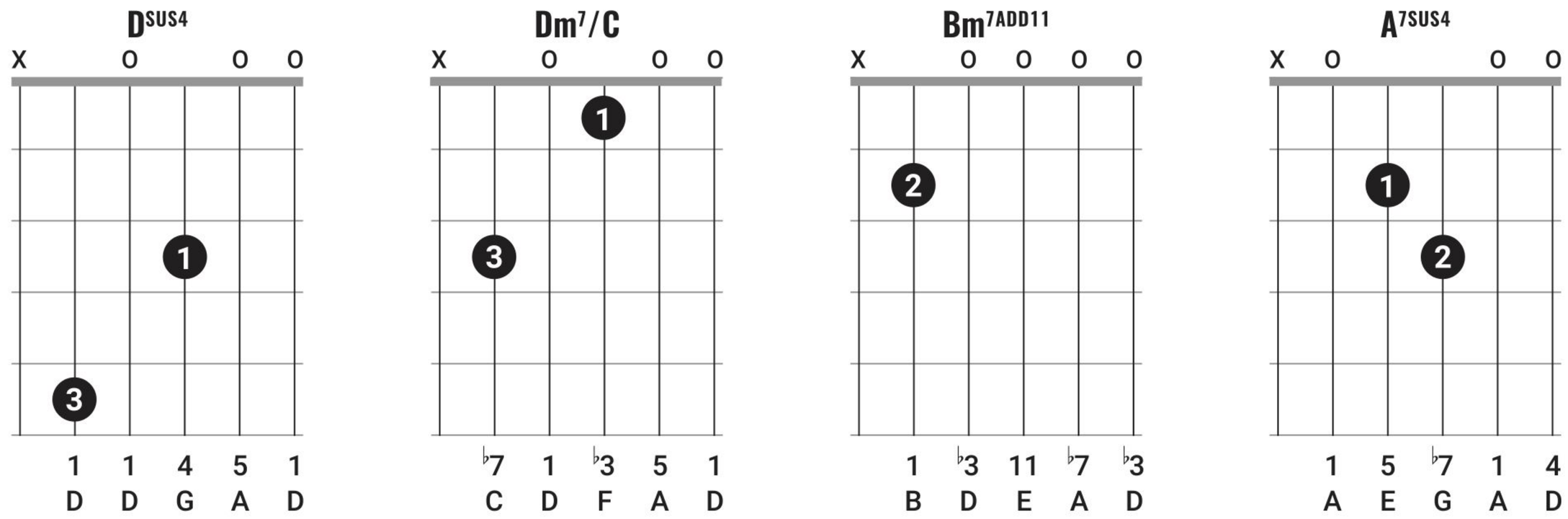


FIGURE 2 DADEAD TUNING



CHORD CLINIC

PLAY LIKE JONI MITCHELL PART TWO

WORDS ROD FOGG

Joni Mitchell often uses conventional altered tunings, such as the open D tuning in Part One, but she's also developed some which are uniquely her own. Digital tuners at the ready…

There are three common altered tunings widely seen as alternatives to standard tuning. These are, from low to high, open D (DADF#AD), open G (DGDGBD) and DADGAD. The first two present a sonorous open-string chord, but DADGAD is often referred to as a modal tuning, as the notes are derived from a scale rather than a chord. We looked at Mitchell's use of open D in Part One and while she uses open G and DADGAD extensively, here, we're examining her more unusual tunings. Example 1 is in the modal tuning of DADEAD – this is easy to grasp, because it is the same as open D, but with the third string tuned to E. This Dsus2 tuning makes it possible to have either the major third (F#) or the minor third (F) on the third string. Try playing arpeggios, two bars each, on the first two chords, emphasising the notes which fall on the third, fourth and fifth strings. Start with the low D in the bass with your thumb. Then strum the D minor chord, adding the ♭6 from the fourth chord as an embellishment.

Staying with the same tuning and moving on to figure 2, we find a common Joni Mitchell technique of moving a shape progressively down the guitar – this one is intended to be strummed and could represent a chorus to figure 1's verse. With altered tunings, the intervals between the strings are more important than the overall pitch. For example, CGCEGC might look puzzling, but it's the same tuning as open D, with each string two frets lower in pitch. To avoid being confused by lower-pitched versions of the same tuning, transpose any low tunings up until the bass note is a D; you may find that it is just a lower-pitched version of an otherwise-familiar tuning.

The next tuning, DADGBD, used in figure 3, can be seen as a variation on either DADGAD or open G, as it has elements of both. From another viewpoint, it is standard tuning with both E strings tuned down a whole step; this is often called double-drop D (Elena Tonra of Ex:Re said she used this tuning, in her interview in issue 365). There is a major triad on the top three strings, which works well when using the lower three strings as an open pedal.

Play a two-bar phrase with the first two chords in the first bar and the third chord in the second bar. Then try sliding your finger around to other frets to see what works – as with all these open tunings, just playing the open strings can sound impressive.

Figure 4 also uses double-drop D, this time creating some unusual voicings of D5, G and A11 chords. Try re-fingering the D5 chord so that the C note, first fret, is on the second (B) string; this will give you a D7

FIGURE 3 DADGBD TUNING

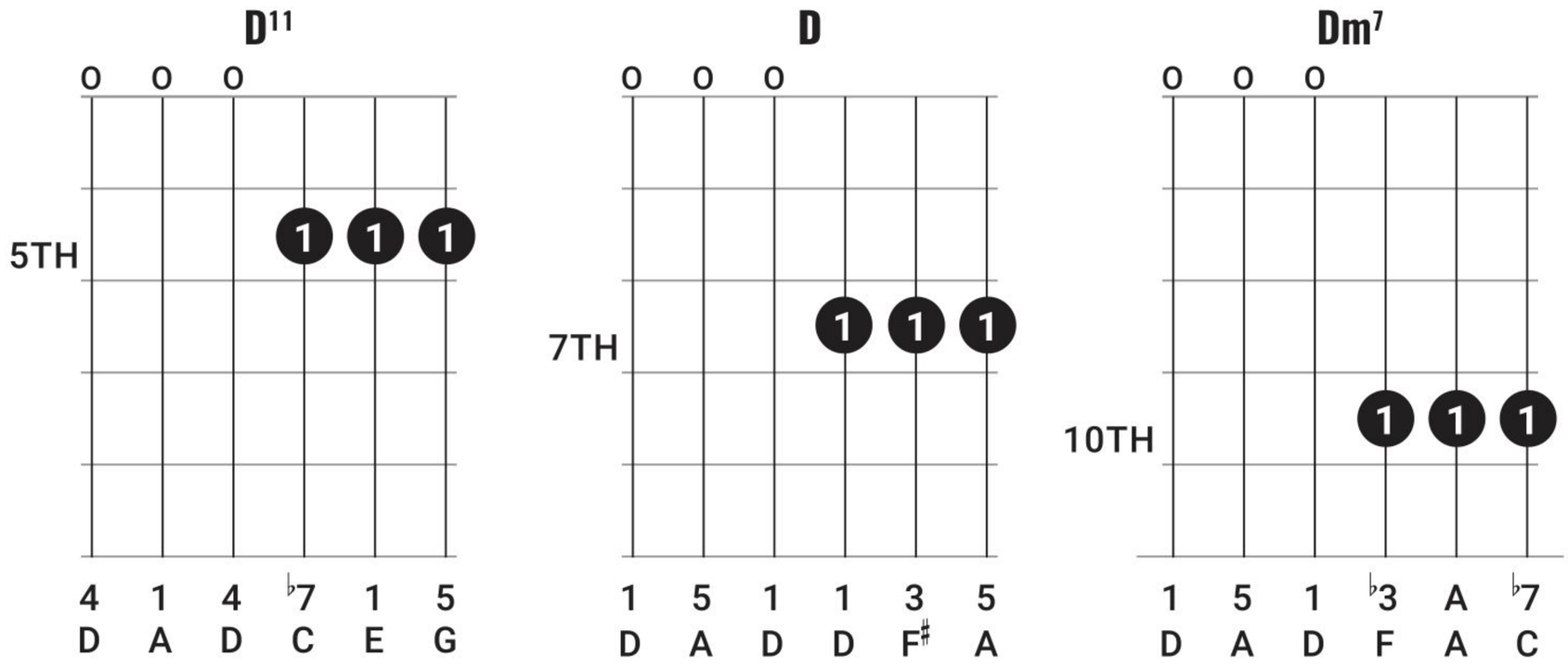


FIGURE 4 DADGBD TUNING

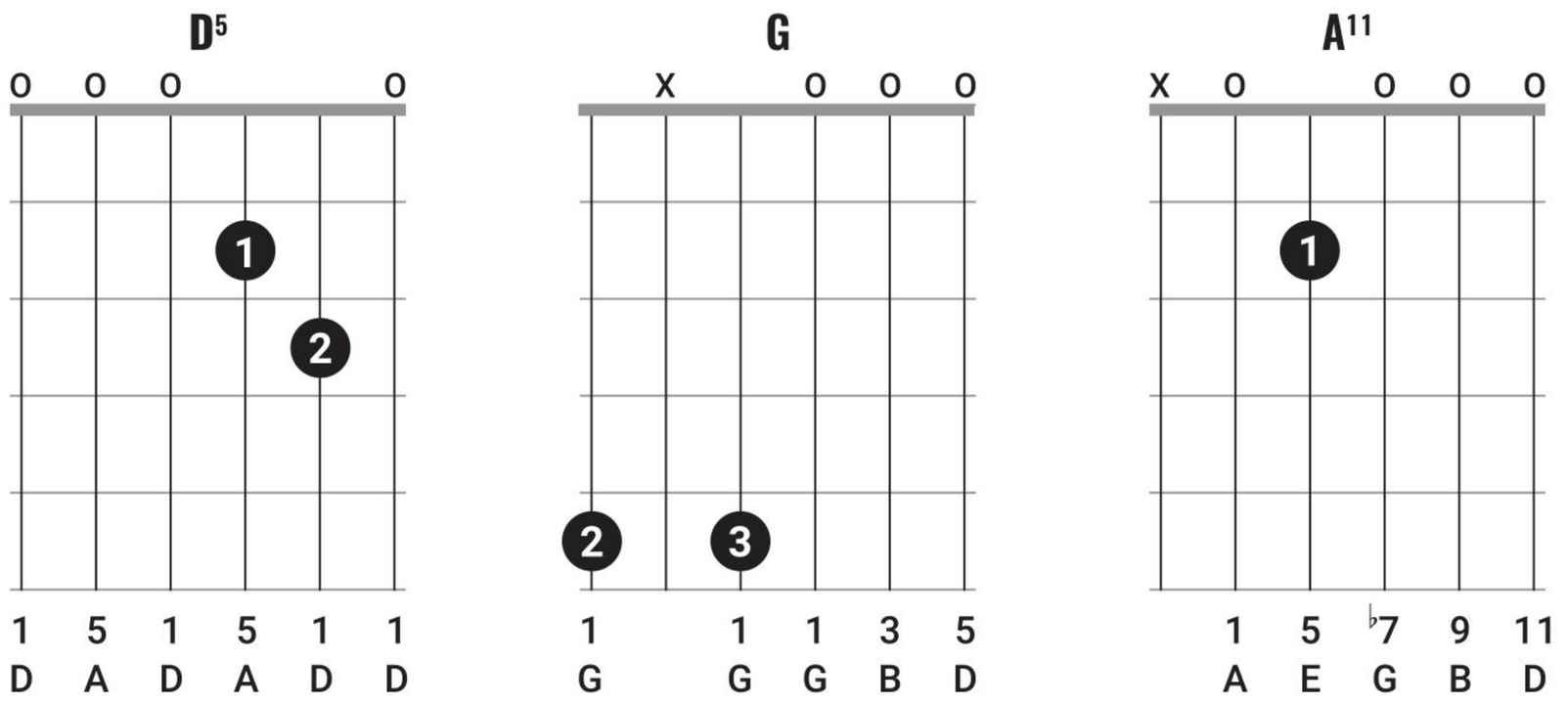


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FIGURE 5 DACFGC TUNING

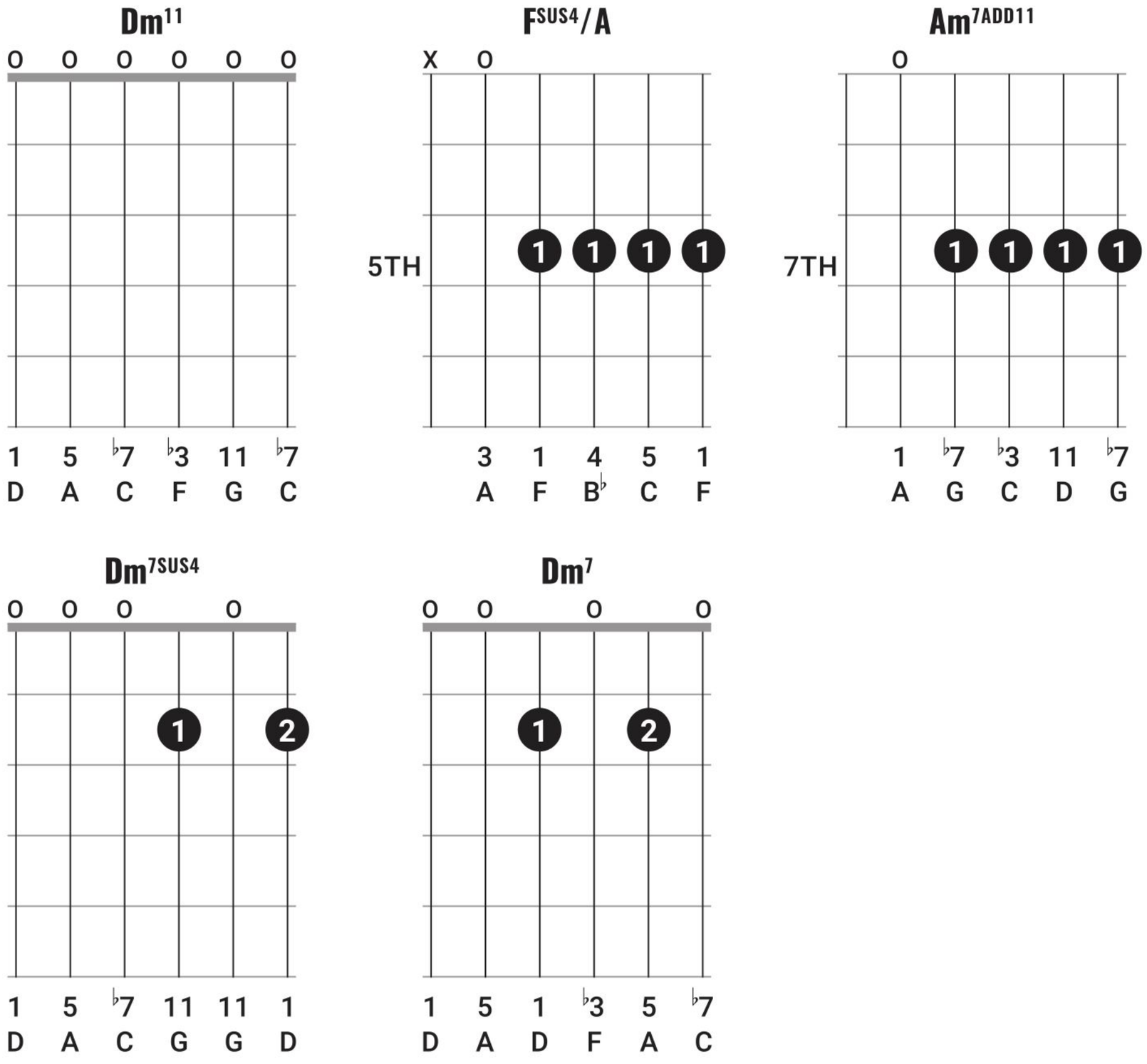
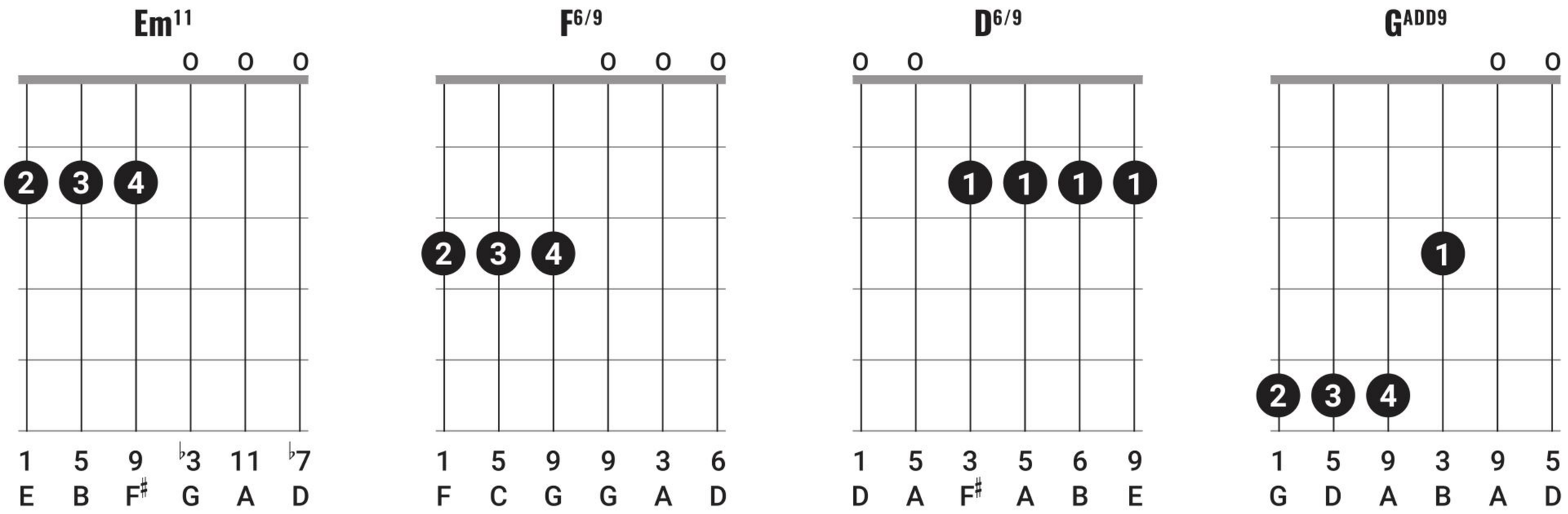


FIGURE 6 DAEGAD TUNING



chord with no third. You can play G7 by lowering the note on the third (D) string in the second chord by two frets from G to F.

Try switching back and forth between these two seventh chords before arriving on the A11 when the time is right. Alternatively, a straight A major chord is available simply by laying your first finger down in a half-barre across the top four strings at the second fret, using the open fifth (A) string as the root note.

The tuning in figure 5 is DACFGC, which makes a Dm11 chord. This tuning can be found on recordings as CGB♭E♭FB♭, but as mentioned above, moving it up to D reveals its relationship to DADGAD. The top four strings have all been taken down a whole step. Try playing 12th-fret harmonics instead of the first open-string chord; the remaining four chords can make a two-bar pattern, which works well with some gentle strumming.

On 1976 album *Hejira*, Mitchell uses one of her lowest tunings, BF♯C♯EF♯B. This is clearly not an open-string chord, so we might presume that, like DADGAD, it's a modal tuning. Live, Mitchell sometimes tunes up a half-step to CGDFGC. Shifting each note up reveals it to be the same as DAEGAD; in other words, DADGAD with a raised fourth string.

Play arpeggios using the first two chords in figure 6, keeping to the lowest four strings but occasionally adding in the top two strings for dramatic effect. Then play the last two chords as a two-chord groove and repeat ad lib, for just one of the almost endless possibilities that altered tunings open up for you as a player… **G**

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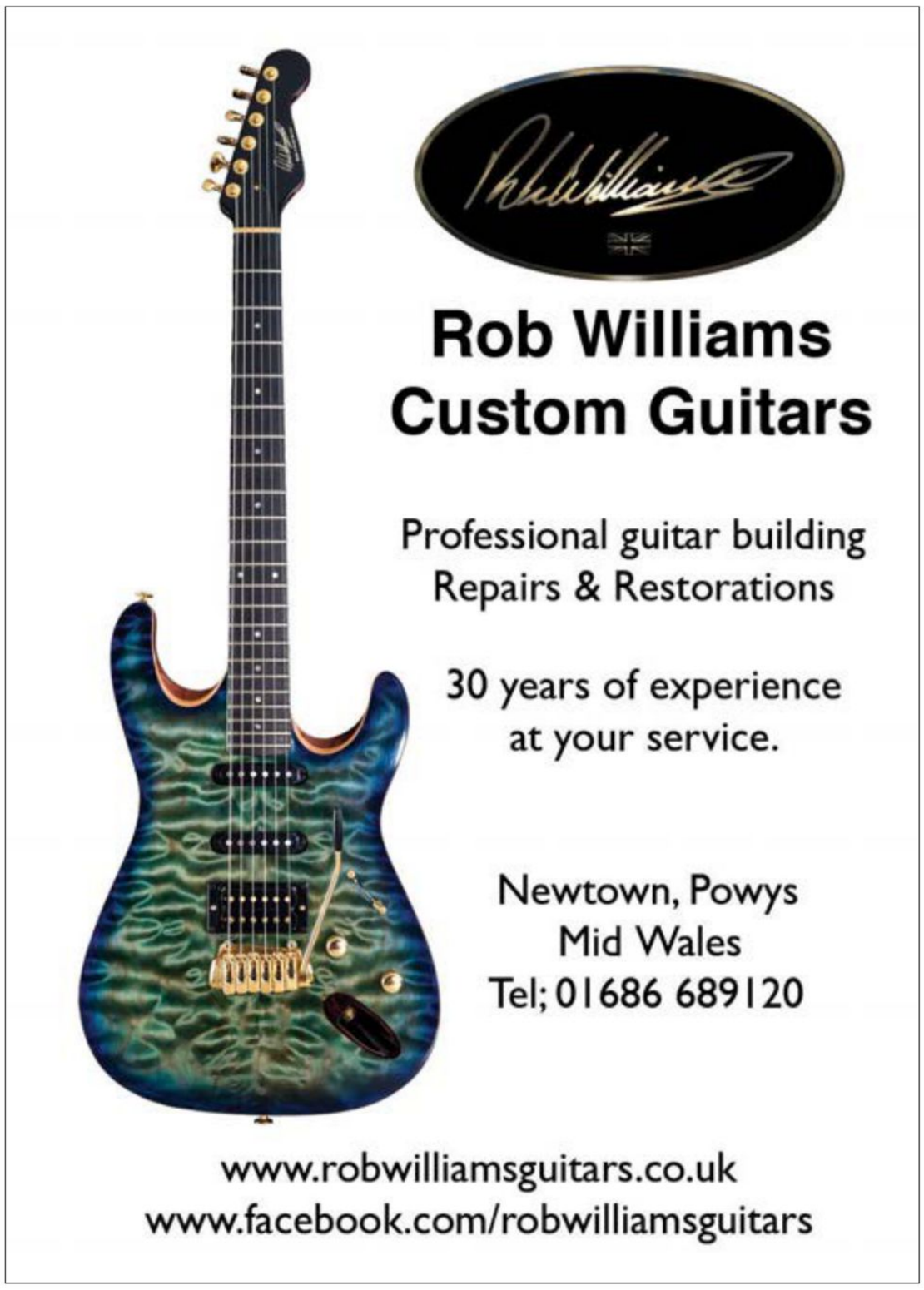

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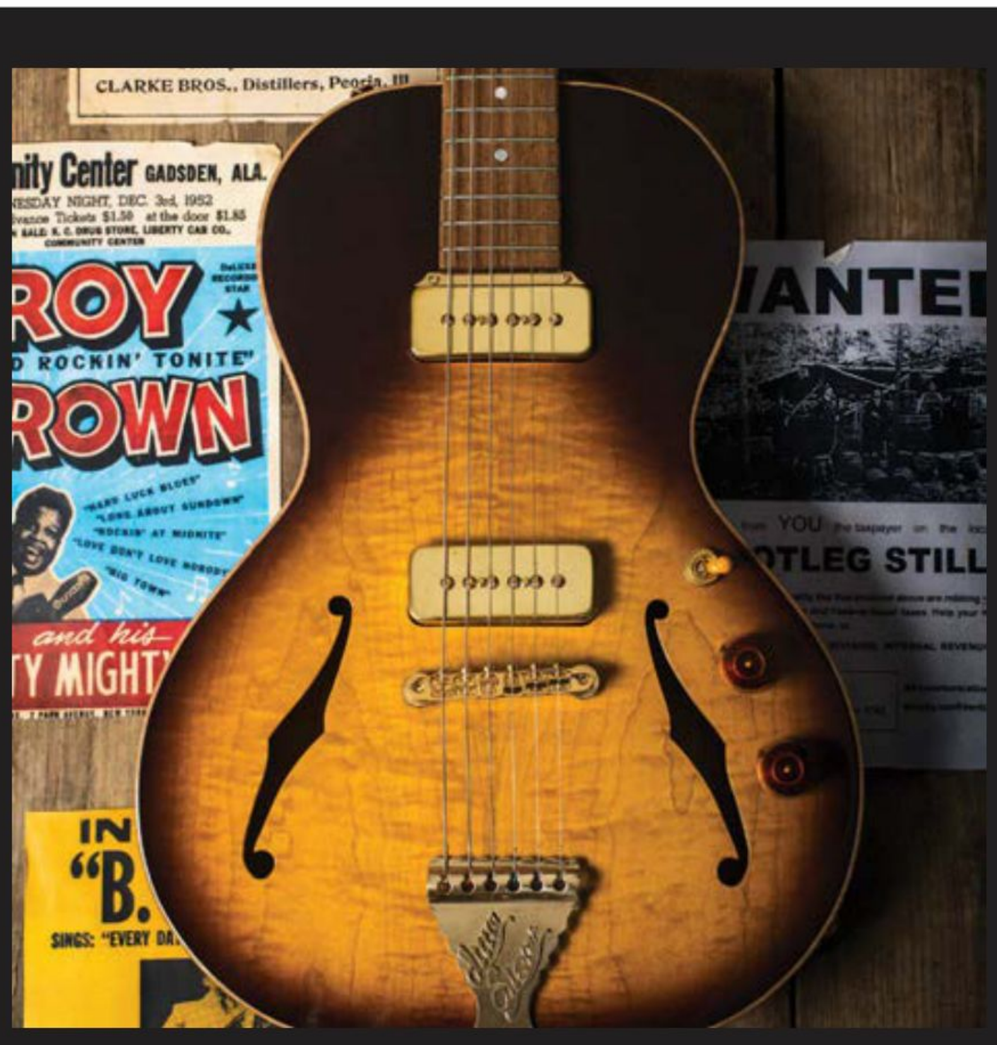

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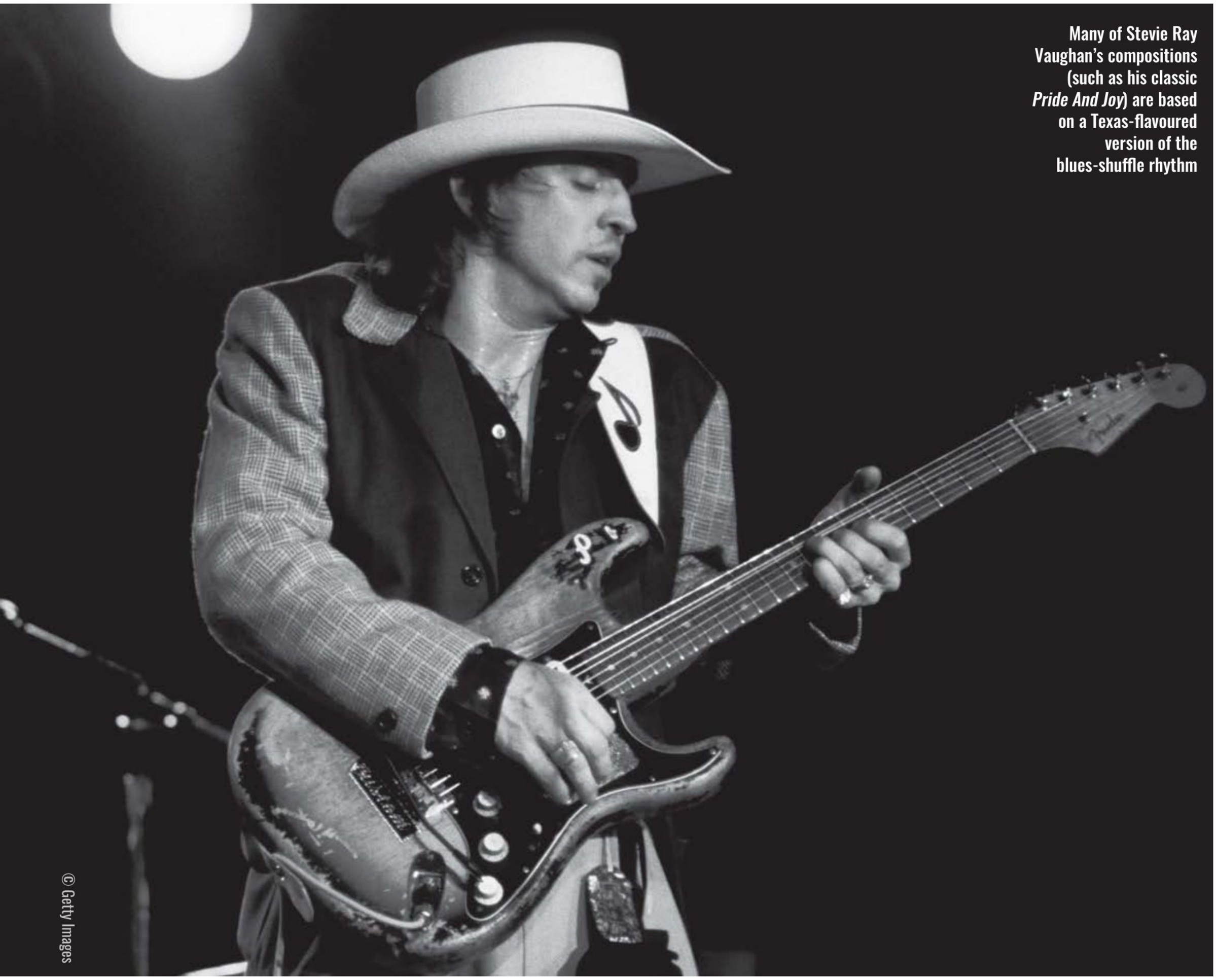

Many of Stevie Ray Vaughan's compositions (such as his classic *Pride And Joy*) are based on a Texas-flavoured version of the blues-shuffle rhythm

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ESSENTIAL BLUES LESSONS

PART TWO THE SHUFFLE

WORDS LEIGH FUGE

In the second part of our new tuition series designed to teach you how to become a better blues player from the ground up, we add some rhythmic flavour to the 12-bar blues chord progression that we learned in part one. Meet the blues shuffle…

In part one of this series in, we looked at the form of a 12-bar blues chord progression – the familiar format that underpins most classic blues music. In this lesson, we're going to apply a rhythm to that basic progression. This is a specific rhythm known as a blues shuffle.

If you know a little about blues playing, you may be familiar with the term 'shuffle'. A shuffle is a beat based on eighth-note triplets. You can count a shuffle by breaking your four main beats down into triplets:

1 2 3, **2** 2 3, **3** 2 3, **4** 2 3

This type of rhythm dates back to the early 1930s. The first known recording of it was on a track called *Lead Pencil Blues*, recorded by Johnnie Temple in 1935. The shuffle style of playing has been a staple in blues rhythm since the beginning, but it has been used time and time again through the ages in many forms. Led Zeppelin's *Rock And Roll* is a fine example of taking a shuffle style and adapting it for a rock sound. As with our last instalment, all the examples in this lesson are in A minor, but are transposable to whatever key you see fit.

EXAMPLE 1

This first example of a shuffle is using only open-position chords. We are using an A5, D5 and E5 chord; these may be more familiar to you from their more common name, powerchords. We will be alternating between the second and fourth fret, with the open string above ringing. The rhythm for each bar will be sticking with the shuffle feel. Divide each beat into three sub-beats. You're playing on the downbeat of each bar

EXAMPLE 1

Standard tuning

EXAMPLE 2

EXAMPLE 3

(1, 2, 3, 4) and also the third sub-beat of each bar:

1 2 **3**, **2** 2 **3**, **3** 2 **3**, **4** 2 **3**

EXAMPLE 2

This example follows the same approach, but with single notes instead of chords. This is a walking-style shuffle pattern and is very reminiscent of BB King's song *Rock Me Baby*.

Our A, D and E chords have now been moved to their single-note forms. A being the 5th fret of the sixth (low E) string, D being the 5th fret of the fifth (A) string and E being the 7th fret of the fifth (A) string. For each grouping, you'll be alternating between the root note, the octave and the minor seventh. Although this is a picked pattern, it still follows the shuffle rhythm. You will still be playing on the downbeat of each bar (1, 2, 3, 4) and also the third sub-beat of each bar:

1 2 **3**, **2** 2 **3**, **3** 2 **3**, **4** 2 **3**

EXAMPLE 3

This final example is similar to the first one, except we are now playing this chord-based pattern from a fretted position instead of an open position. This is a typical blues-rock-style way of playing a 12-bar progression. If you take this style of playing and ramp up the speed, you'll feel like Chuck Berry!

The important thing here is noticing that our A, D and E chords are now played as powerchords. A being the 5th fret on the sixth (low E) string, and D and E being on the fifth (A) string at the 5th and 7th frets respectively.

Similar to the first example, the alternate bars involve reaching up to a note two frets higher than the second note of the chord. However, this now means reaching from the 5th and 7th fret to the 5th and 9th. This is a great way to get your little finger more involved, if you've not already done so in your playing so far. Take your time with this one, it takes a while to loosen your hands up to master the stretches.

The shuffle rhythm remains intact with this example:

1 2 **3**, **2** 2 **3**, **3** 2 **3**, **4** 2 **3**

TRY IT YOURSELF

Blues music is designed to be sung over so it's useful to be able to play in different keys. Have a go at playing your 12-bar sequence in these three styles in various other keys, to get a feel for playing your blues rhythms in different fretboard registers.

In the next lesson, we will take a look at some extended chords, which we can use to spice up our blues progressions. **G**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Leigh Fuge is a guitar teacher and professional musician from Swansea in the UK with over 10 years of experience. He's taught hundreds of students face-to-face and via the MGR Music platform. To find a qualified guitar tutor in your area, visit mgrmusic.com

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TALKBOX

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INTERVIEW CHRIS VINNICOMBE

The Andertons head honcho and online video star talks guilty pop pleasures, walls of valve amps and the never-ending quest to play all the chords

The moment it all started…
"I spent my childhood in and around Andertons, but seeing [Pink Floyd's] *Delicate Sound Of Thunder* live video in 1988 was probably 'that moment'."

I couldn't live without my…
"It's a boring answer, but probably a looper pedal."

The one that got away…
"A 1966 Gibson Hummingbird – the best acoustic I've ever tried, but I didn't have the cash to buy it at the time. Luckily, I've never had to sell anything I've really liked."

The best advice that I've ever been given…
"Practice more. Obviously, I totally ignored that, but I accept that it's the best advice!"

If I could be in any band, it would be…
"Led Zeppelin or Pink Floyd… Can't decide! Probably Led Zep."

The first thing I play when I pick up a guitar…
"A standard blues lick that [fellow Andertons YouTube presenter] Danish Pete can't stand any more – he's heard it so many times, I think it's like fingernails going down a blackboard to him!"

The first thing that would be on my rider…
"I don't really like to make a fuss, so probably nothing backstage, but I would want two or three roadies to carry the wall of valve amps that I'd insist on using every night! Maybe a tech to repair the ones I'd blow up, too…"

My guilty pleasure…
"A good pop song. I totally remember having to lie about not liking *Faith* by George Michael when I was at school. Currently, I really like Sigrid. Sorry!"

I'd love to be able to play…
"I want to play all the good chords without having to think about it, but I haven't unlocked that secret yet."

The biggest challenge facing the industry…
"It doesn't feel like the guitar industry is facing any immediate challenges – sales have been pretty good for us and guitar music is still very popular. However, I don't think we can rest on our laurels, and I do believe the biggest win for the industry is to focus on better and more engaging tuition, so that fewer people give up during that critical first six months.

"I also think we need to ensure that, as an industry, we make the guitar world as diverse and inclusive as possible, so no matter what your background, age or ability is, you feel like you can enjoy playing the guitar and being involved in some sort of music scene." **G**

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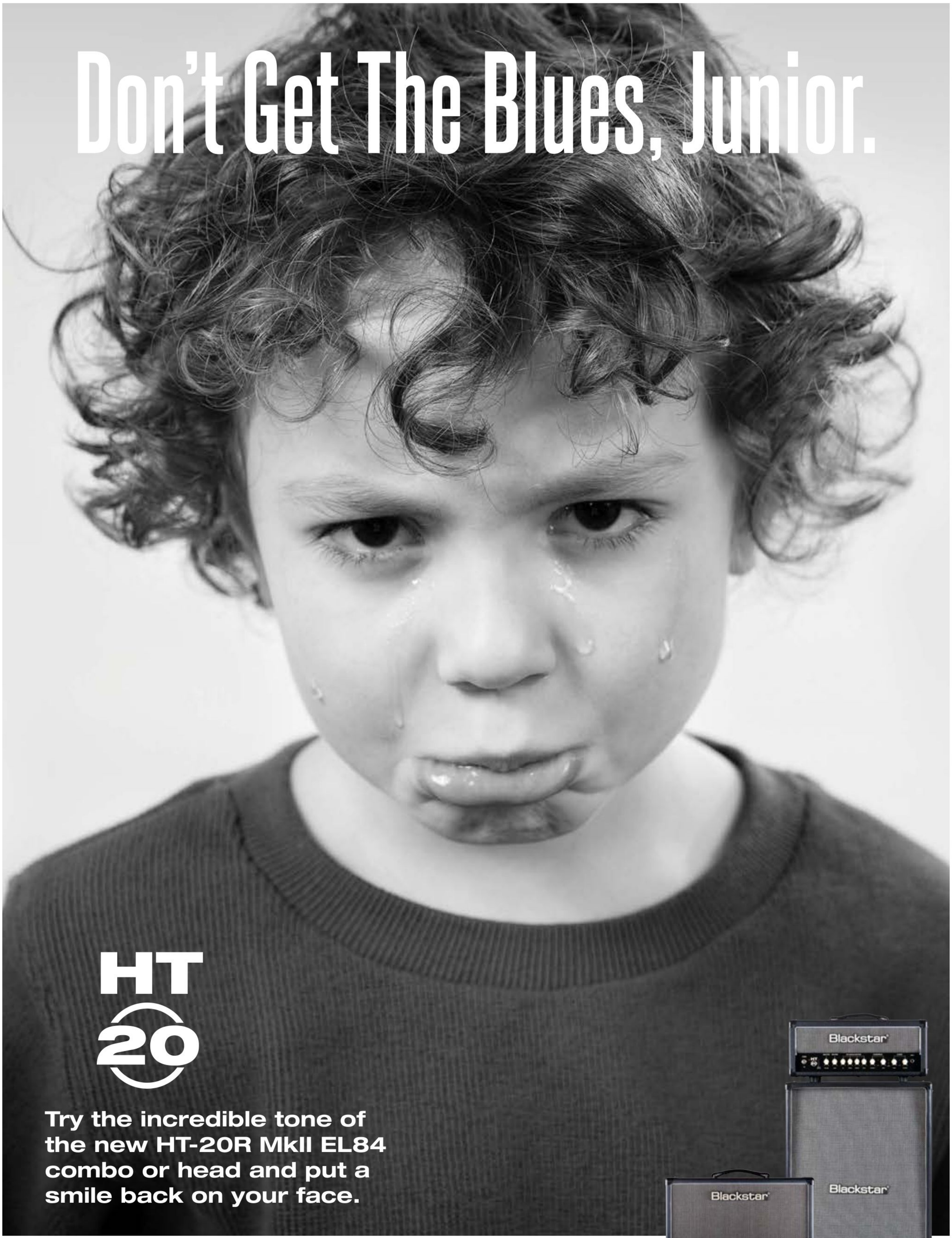

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